

# Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity



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# Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity

*By*

Steven Fine



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*Cover image:* Model of the Beth Alpha synagogue, 1972 (courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum).

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## TRANSLITERATION AND ABBREVIATIONS

Transliterations of Hebrew and of Jewish Aramaic dialects follow the “general” system used by the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972, 1:71) with the exceptions that the letter *tsadi* is transliterated with “ts” and *qof* is transliterated with a “q.” Abbreviations have been kept to a minimum, so that the broadest range of readers might navigate this volume with ease. The following abbreviations are used for primary sources that are frequently cited:

- |                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ant.</i>                 | Flavius Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> , unless otherwise noted is cited from <i>The Complete Works</i> , trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, R. Marcus, A. Wikgren, and L. Feldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930–1965), vols. 4–9. |
| b.                          | Babylonian Talmud, ed. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1521, unless otherwise noted.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>IJO Kleinasien</i>       | Walter Ameling, <i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i> , vol. 2, <i>Kleinasien</i> (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>IJO Syria and Cyprus</i> | David Noy and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, <i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i> , vol. 3, <i>Syria and Cyprus</i> (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).                                                                                                             |
| m.                          | Mishnah. Unless otherwise noted, cited according to ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1953).                                                                                                                                |
| t.                          | Tosefta. Unless otherwise noted, cited through tractate Baba Batra according to ed. S. Lieberman (2nd ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), and from Sanhedrin on according to ed. M. S. Zuckermann (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1970).           |
| <i>War</i>                  | Flavius Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i> . Unless otherwise noted, cited from <i>The Complete Works</i> , trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927–1928), vols. 1–3.                                                   |
| y.                          | Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud, cited from <i>Talmud Yerushalmi: According to Ms. Or 4720 (Sca.3)</i> (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2005).                                                                                            |



## PREFACE

The essays assembled in this volume each touch on the relationship between texts and artifacts for the interpretation of ancient history—in our case, the Jewish experience under Rome and New Rome, leading up to the Islamic transformation of the eastern Mediterranean world during the seventh and eighth centuries. Some of the essays are new, the result of recent research and thinking. In some cases, I have returned to studies first conceived near the beginning of my career, revisiting old friends and seeing them through what I hope are more mature eyes. Most were written during the decade since I completed research for *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* in 2002 (it was published by Cambridge University Press in 2005 and somewhat revised in 2010), and particularly in response to that book and its reception. Some reviewers of *Art and Judaism* suggested that additional discussion of my methodology might be in order. I gladly take up their advice and introduce this volume with just that. Each essay begins with an “iconic” artifact that serves as an organizing vehicle for the entire piece—a lens through which to view the complex relationship between “things,” “words,” and their modern interpreters.

I am most grateful to my colleagues, Joseph Angel and Jess Olson, for encouraging me to take on this project, and to Jennifer Pavelko, my ever-creative editor at Brill, for supporting it from its inception. As always, the people of E. J. Brill have been a delight to work with. I especially thank Katelyn Chin, Julia Berick, and Rachel Crofut for seeing this volume through the press with such diligence, and Gene McGarry—who saved me from innumerable errors. The publishers of the original versions of essays included in this volume have been most generous in allowing me to reprint and expand upon my earlier studies, and I thank them very much.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1, “‘See, I Have Called the *Renowned* Name of Bezalel, Son of Uri . . .’: Josephus’s Portrayal of the Biblical ‘Architect,’” is updated from an earlier version that appeared in *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to the Messiah: Studies in Honor of Professor Louis H. Feldman*, ed. Steven Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 27–44.

Chapter 2, “A Note on Ossuary Burial and the Resurrection of the Dead in First-Century Jerusalem,” is updated from an earlier version that appeared in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 51 (2000): 69–76, Reprinted by permission.

Jesse Abelman of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University helped with all technical aspects of this project with good cheer and good sense. The Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies funded Jesse's work, which was critical to the project.

This volume, like most of what I do, exists in no small part thanks to my wife, Leah Bierman Fine, and is enriched by our most important project, our sons Elisha and Koby. I am pleased to dedicate *Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity* to my friend and mentor, Sylvia Axelrod Herskowitz. Sylvia was the founding director and for decades the guiding light of Yeshiva University Museum. One of the great Jewish museum professionals of our time, she retired in 2009 after an amazingly productive career in museology. I first came to know Sylvia Herskowitz in 1989, when she called me in Jerusalem and asked if I—a mere graduate student at the time—might be available to curate an exhibition in Talmudic archaeology in New York. I jumped, and this encounter bloomed into our award-winning *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the*

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Chapter 4, “When I Went to Rome . . . There I Saw the Menorah’: The Jerusalem Temple Implements in Rabbinic Memory, History, and Myth,” is updated from an earlier version that appeared in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the “Other” in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough (Boston: American Schools Of Oriental Research, 2007), 1:169–180.

Chapter 5, “Coloring the Temple: Polychromy and the Jerusalem Temple in Late Antiquity,” appears as “Babylonian Talmud *Sukkah* 51b/Baba Batra 4b: The Polychromy of Herod’s Temple,” in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

Chapter 6, “Jewish Identity at the Cusp of Empires: The Jews of Dura Europos between Rome and Persia,” is updated from an earlier version that appeared in *Cultural Identity and the Peoples of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Erich S. Gruen (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 289–306. Reprinted by permission.

Chapter 8, “Furnishing God’s Study House: An Exercise in Rabbinic Imagination,” is based largely upon my “‘Chancel’ Screens in Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues: A Source from the Cairo Genizah,” in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin, *Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture* 5 (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 1999), 67–85. Reprinted by permission.

Chapter 10, “Between Liturgy and Social History: Priestly Power in Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues?,” is revised from an earlier version that appeared in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 56, no. 1 (2005): 1–9. Reprinted by permission.

Chapter 11, “The Menorah and the Cross: Historiographic Reflections on a Recent Discovery from Laodicea on the Lycus,” is slightly updated from the version that appeared in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations in Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 31–50.

Chapter 12, “Jews and Judaism under *Byzantium and Islam*,” is slightly updated from the version that appeared in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th–9th Century)*, ed. Helen Evans with Brandie Ratliff (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 102–106, copyright © 2012 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Reprinted by permission.

*Synagogue in the Ancient World* (1997). From that project to the present, Sylvia has supported my work—and my dreams—in every way. This volume is for Sylvia, with love.

Steven Fine

*Erev Shavuot, 5772*

May 25, 2012





## INTRODUCTION

Historians who always insist on the need to reconstruct the *Sitz in Leben* of the phenomena they treat should apply their professional insights to themselves as well.

—Amos Funkenstein, “Jewish History Among the Thorns” (1995)<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1. Jacob Binder, *The Talmudist*, Boston, 1919 (courtesy of Milton Freeman).

---

<sup>1</sup> Amos Funkenstein, “Jewish History among the Thorns,” in *Thinking Impossibilities: The Intellectual Legacy of Amos Funkenstein*, ed. E. A. Westman and D. Biale (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 311, a revised translation of an article that appeared in Hebrew in *Zion* 60 (1995), 335–347.

In 1926, at the height of the “Roaring Twenties,” the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, received with great fanfare a large oil painting first known as *The Old Talmudist*, and then as *The Talmudist* (painted in 1919, Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> This painting was the creation of Jacob Binder (1887–1987), a local Jewish artist and a student/associate of prominent American artists Joseph De Camp and John Singer Sargent. Binder was an unlikely artist to be so honored. A naturalized American and a Boston portraitist trained in the art academies of Vilna and Petrograd, Binder painted *The Talmudist* based upon sittings of recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in the Dorchester and Roxbury sections of Boston. This large canvas presents an aging European Jew, bedecked in a flowing white *tallit*, a silver collar adorning the prayer shawl. His head rests on his arm in a contemplative mode common to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century portraiture as he pores over a page of Talmud in a traditional manner. In the background, a bookcase is stuffed with the large tomes of the Babylonian Talmud.

*The Talmudist* was more than just a somewhat early example of a genre of nostalgia painting that was later to cover the walls of many American Jewish homes. It was to become the cause célèbre of the *Boston Jewish Advocate*, the local Jewish weekly, in its fight for Jewish cultural position in the deeply competitive yet entrenched world of Boston society. The publisher, Alexander Brin, made the donation of this painting to the museum a major communal project, enlisting prominent community leaders, scholars, and the general population—both Jews and, to some extent, non-Jews. The donation of *The Talmudist* was presented as nothing less than a communal obligation, a response to a supposedly anti-Semitic painting that drew on traditional medieval Christian themes of “Ecclesia” and a broken “Synagoga” by Sargent at the Boston Public Library (Figure 2). It was to be a statement of Jews having “made it” in America. Jews were outraged by the Sargent painting, even while the artist, a Brahmin himself, was apparently clueless regarding the affront.<sup>3</sup> *The Talmudist* was a conscious attempt to buy and assert a place in the inner sanctum of Boston’s cultural elite, the Museum of Fine Arts. Truth be told, according to museum records, *The Talmudist* has never been publicly exhibited at the MFA. This says much about the unequal relationship between the established museum on the Fenway—which as a result of the Sargent

<sup>2</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 26.201. Dimensions: 107 × 101.92 cm.

<sup>3</sup> Sally M. Promey, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent’s “Triumph of Religion” at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).



Figure 2. John Singer Sargent, "Synagoga," detail from *Triumph of Religion*, Boston Public Library, 1919 (courtesy of the Boston Public Library).

incident probably could not afford *not* to accept the painting—and the Americanizing Jewish community. To the Jewish donors, this painting, by now long forgotten, was of great importance. It was construed as a cultural icon, as a way for new generations of American Jews to remember “a world passed by.” Some of the donors to this project will be well known to readers of this volume. They included, most prominently, Harvard’s Harry

Austryn Wolfson, holder of the recently endowed Nathan Littauer Professorship of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy (1925), the first such position in an American university. This donation was touted in a headline on September 30, 1926: "Professor Wolfson Contributes to 'The Talmudist' Fund." The article reported that Wolfson "is glad to be numbered among the benefactors and public spirited men and women who are seeking to represent this distinguished portrait as a gift on the part of the Jewish community to the famous Art Museum in the Fenway."<sup>4</sup> For the Jews of Boston, Wolfson symbolized their own transition from the world of *The Old Talmudist* to their new American identities.<sup>5</sup> He was the academic trophy of an emerging Jewish community as it developed a new American-Jewish synthesis, one that was purveyed by the *Jewish Advocate*. This identity was "modern," insofar as it was benignly respectful to an increasingly distant tradition; it was Hebraist, Zionist, and above all, Americanist. Another contributor was Samuel Neusner, then of the *Jewish Advocate's* Western Massachusetts edition, and soon the father of a child who would develop as a preeminent historian of ancient Judaism, Jacob Neusner (b. 1932).<sup>6</sup> My family too had a part in this project—a then-unidentified model for the painting was one Joseph Freeman, a poor carpenter and recent immigrant, and my great-grandfather (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup>

This may seem a strange place to begin a book on Jewish art in antiquity, except that it isn't. The image of *The Talmudist* appeared shortly thereafter in the book review section of the *Boston Evening Transcript*, illustrating

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<sup>4</sup> "Professor Wolfson Contributes to 'The Talmudist' Fund," *The Jewish Advocate* (Boston), September 30, 1926, 1. No document relating to this event is preserved in Wolfson's archive at Harvard, though invitations to a number of art exhibits by Jewish artists are preserved.

<sup>5</sup> Leo W. Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a Scholar* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), especially Isadore Twersky's "Harry Wolfson, in Appreciation," which introduces this volume (xiii–xxvii).

<sup>6</sup> "Additional Contributions Received for Binder Find," *The Jewish Advocate*, August 5, 1926, 2. For an interview with Jacob Neusner about his father, see "Samuel Neusner: The Ledger's Founding Father," *The Jewish Ledger* (Hartford, CT), October 21, 2009, <http://www.jewishledger.com/articles/2009/10/21/news/news04.txt> (accessed May, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> *Jewish Advocate*, January 10, 1944, 10 (<http://www.dorchesteratheneum.org/page.php?id=654>), cited by Richard Heath, *Synagogues of Dorchester* (Dorchester, MA: Dorchester Athaenaeum, 2004), frontispiece. See also Zu Freeman, "When Grandpa Saw the Light," *Yankee Magazine* 51, no. 11 (1987): 48–49. Actually, Freeman was my step-grandfather, marrying my great grandmother, Jane Yum Aarons, after the death of her first husband Louis Aarons in 1912, and raising my paternal grandmother, Kate Aarons Fine (Milton Freeman and Leonard Fine, "Aarons Family Tree," unpublished).



Figure 3. Joseph Freeman, a model for Jacob Binder's *The Talmudist*, ca. 1923 (courtesy of Milton Freeman).

a volume that is of more than passing interest.<sup>8</sup> Above the almost melodramatic image of *The Talmudist* is the title "Judaism in the First Centuries," which begins a review of George Foot Moore's legendary—and still very useful—volume of the same name.<sup>9</sup> The lines between talmudic times and the early twentieth century were blurred by an editor's choice of illustration. Moore, like his contemporaries, read the ancient rabbis through the lens of their own world, as many (especially Samuel Neusner's son, Jacob) have detailed. *The Talmudist*—particularly as it appears in the

<sup>8</sup> Sidney Homer, "Judaism in the First Centuries," *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 16, 1927, book section, 3.

<sup>9</sup> See George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927–1930). A full intellectual biography of Moore is a desideratum. In the meantime, see F. S. Lusby and Steven Fine, "George Foot Moore," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Jones (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 9:6176–77.

*Boston Evening Transcript*—gives visual effect to that conflation. The fact that I find meaning in this story says much about me as the storyteller, for my own scholarship has drawn me deeply into historiography, to a point that my studies of the past and my reflections on the present have become a single cloth, each thread intertwined in a fabric of my making.

The study of ancient Judaism (as we now call it), including ancient Jewish art and architecture, responds to deeply modern questions, reflecting in its first stage a modern search for roots as Jews of all ideologies gave expression to Emancipation not only in *Wissenschaft* scholarship and liturgy, but in brick, mortar, paint, and metal. Synagogue communities and their architects the world over created the largest and greatest boom in Jewish religious construction since Herod the Great rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple (and monumentalized much of urban Palestine) beginning in 20/19 BCE. These moderns created a historicized idiom, drawing upon Egyptian, Neoclassical, Byzantine, Gothic, and especially neo-Moresque vocabularies, and occasionally referenced Jewish architecture, some of it recently “discovered” in Palestine (which included surveys by the Palestine Exploration Society as early as the 1860s and later excavations carried out by Berlin-Jewish philanthropist James Simon’s Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and Hebrew University excavations supported by New York’s Congregation Emanu-El).<sup>10</sup> This modern construction boom, which began during the 1840s and continued through 1929, left behind monumental synagogue buildings from Mumbai to Johannesburg, from Petersburg to San Francisco, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. Many of the most magnificent remains of that first boom are long gone, destroyed by the forces of Nazi Germany or simply torn down in the urban transformations that periodically overtake modern cities. The suburbanization and denominationization of American Jewry during the half century after World War II led to still another boom, this one in a distinctly modernist idiom. Interestingly, some of these “Old-New” synagogues were decorated with mosaics reminiscent

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<sup>10</sup> Simon stood behind the first systematic synagogue excavations in Palestine, carried out by Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger on behalf of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, which he founded. See Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1916), though Simon’s role as financial backer of the excavations is not mentioned there. E. L. Sukenik wrote that “The part played by Mr. James Simon in this undertaking was revealed to me by himself in the course of a lecture which I gave in 1929 at the home of Mr. N. Israel.” “The Present State of Ancient Synagogue Studies,” *Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues* 1 (1949): 9 n. 1. On this lecture, see below, p. 179, n. 50. On Congregation Emanu-El and Palestinian archaeology, see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; first published 2005), 28–29.



of ancient synagogues in Israel.<sup>11</sup> *Art and Judaism* set out in some detail the ideological contexts for the study of ancient Jewish art and archeology.<sup>12</sup> There I focused not only on the pre-Depression American context, but on the Zionist context and finally on the ways that scholars during the second half of the twentieth century—many of them students of both Moore and Wolfson—used the ever-growing corpus of Jewish remains in their own process of identity construction. I particularly focused on American scholarship—on Erwin R. Goodenough and his *Jewish Symbols in the Greco Roman Period* (New York, 1953–1967), on art history's deeply complex relationship with things Jewish, and most of all, on the central importance of Columbia's Morton Smith and his cadre of graduate students. Among Smith's students was the current executor of Goodenough's literary estate, Jacob Neusner.

In the years since the completion of my earlier volume, I have become ever more cognizant of the haze that separates us from antiquity and aware that that haze is far thicker than scholars often acknowledge. This fog is not merely a function of the miniscule number of sources—literary and archaeological—available for study. The study of antiquity easily devolves into philologically and iconographically sophisticated self-reflection, with selections from the meager sources chosen carefully according to ideological or disciplinary predilections and set as jewels in fashionable crowns of our own fashioning. The essays that appear in this volume are all inevitably about the present—some explicitly, and others in less overt ways. What they have in common is a shared focus upon the Jewish experience of Greco-Roman visual culture through the lens of a scholar who prides himself on being just as conversant in the visual materials as the literary sources (though with greater joy in the Hebrew and Aramaic literary sources), both from explicitly Jewish contexts and from the broader umbrella civilization in which Jews functioned. My approach begins with the object, whether it be text or artifact—its materials, form, syntax, grammar, and iconography, and builds out from that very tactile encounter. I begin each study as both a philologist and as an art historian. “In the beginning was the Word,” writes the author of John's Gospel. To this I will add—building upon my deep-seated yeshiva, museum, and Jerusalem training—“and the Object.”

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<sup>11</sup> Examples include Beth Tzedec Congregation, Toronto; Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, CA; and Beth El Synagogue Center, New Rochelle, NY. An exhaustive search is a desideratum, as is a study of the deployment of mosaic arts in Zionist/Israeli/Jewish art.

<sup>12</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 12–56, 124–125, 163–166.

In the next phase of interpretation, my method turns to context, building on what Clifford Geertz called the “thick description” of culture.<sup>13</sup> My approach, first given form under the influence of folklorist Dov Noy at the Hebrew University in 1977/8, is informed by the “anthropological turn” and the “cultural turn” of historical scholarship—new and exciting when I was a young graduate student, as exemplified for me in the work of anthropologist Victor Turner,<sup>14</sup> historians Robert Darnton,<sup>15</sup> Peter Brown<sup>16</sup> and Carlo Ginzberg,<sup>17</sup> art historian Thomas Mathews,<sup>18</sup> and in Jewish studies by anthropologists Shlomo Deshen, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblatt<sup>19</sup> and historian Ivan Marcus.<sup>20</sup> Here my interests shift from the artifact per se to the human beings who made, used, and lived with the texts and artifacts under study. My explicit, if unrealistic, goal is to project flesh and blood into three-dimensional spaces and in so doing to imagine the lost world in which those people thrived. While my models are historiographic, it was my childhood encounter with Plimoth Plantation, a historical “reconstruction” of a seventeenth-century village in Massachusetts,<sup>21</sup> my adolescent enchantment with the then-new and deliciously Disneyesque “Villa of the Papyri” at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu (where as a young graduate

<sup>13</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> I am thinking in particular of Turner’s work on pilgrimage. See Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> See in particular the essays collected in Peter L. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See now Carlo Ginzberg, *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*, trans. A. C. Tedeschi, J. Tedeschi (Berkeley: University of California, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> Shlomo Deshen, “The Kol Nidre Enigma: An Anthropological View of the Day of Atonement Liturgy,” *Ethnology* 18, no. 2 (1979): 121–133; Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblatt, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). This approach animated my master’s thesis, “On Two Illustrated Passover Haggadot: Matzah-Baking in Late Medieval Southern Germany” (University of Southern California, 1984; advisors: Stephen S. Kayser and Selma Holo). For an excellent summary, see Miri Rubin, “What is Cultural History Now?,” in *What is History Now?*, ed. D. Cannadine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 80–95.

<sup>21</sup> See Stephen Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008). On this phenomenon more broadly, see Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblatt’s foreword to that volume (xi–xviii) and her *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).



student I gave tours—in full costume—entitled “A Palestinian Rabbi in Caesar’s Court”)<sup>22</sup> and my own experience interpreting the Talmudic Village in Qasrin on the Golan Heights, an archaeological excavation turned into a heritage site, that gave sinews to this interest.<sup>23</sup> These were among the experiences that formed my continuing love of museum exhibition as an interpretive medium. This interest is exemplified most prominently in my *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, organized by Yeshiva University Museum in 1996.<sup>24</sup>

If “thick description” was to provide a rubric for the interpretation of ancient Jewish culture, it occurred to me only slowly that archive-based historiography would control that interpretation. Essential to my work is a complex and intimate understanding of the scholars who have interpreted “my” primary sources and the worlds in which these scholars flourished—an approach impressed upon me by Amos Funkenstein during our time together at UCLA.<sup>25</sup> This has involved both fieldwork with scholars and students who have known the likes of E. L. Sukenik and Goodenough; archival research on scholars who are nearly forgotten, like Nahum Slouschz and Moses Gaster, and even an excursion into the esoteric cultures of Freemasonry and the Fraternal Order of Bnai Brith (to which many fin de siècle Jewish scholars and leaders belonged) in an attempt to better understand the history of scholarship. The lives of my predecessors are so deeply intertwined with the sources they interpret

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<sup>22</sup> Marion True and Jorge Silveti, *The Getty Villa* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Ann Killebrew and Steven Fine, “Qatzrin: Reconstructing Village Life in Talmudic Times,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27, no. 3 (1991): 44–56; Ann E. Killebrew, Billy J. Grantham, and Steven Fine, “The Qasrin ‘Talmudic’ House: On the Use of Domestic Space during the Byzantine Period,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66, nos. 1–2 (2003): 59–72.

<sup>24</sup> The catalog, under my editorship, was published by Yeshiva University Museum and Oxford University Press in 1996.

<sup>25</sup> See Funkenstein, “Jewish History among the Thorns.” Funkenstein generously introduced me to many of the approaches presented in this essay in the course of more than a year of one-on-one meetings at UCLA (1986–1987). Funkenstein’s thought deeply influenced both his student David Biale, author of *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), and Susannah Heschel, author of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Steven M. Wasserstrom was essential to my initiation to the world of archival research—an approach that until recently has not been common in the study of Jews in the Greco-Roman world. See his *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Significant biographies of scholars of Judaism in antiquity include Neal Silverman, *A Prophet amongst You: The Life of Yigael Yadin: Soldier, Scholar, and Mythmaker of Modern Israel* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993); and Albert Baumgarten, *Elias Bickerman as a Historian of the Jews: A Twentieth-Century Tale* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

that understanding the strands leading to each interpretation is a field unto itself, which is perhaps why some of the greatest historians of the twentieth century presented themselves as *sui generis*, underestimating important influences upon their work.<sup>26</sup> With this knowledge in hand, though, we can start to see where the world of the interpreter, as well as his or her personal predilections, informs or limits interpretation and begin to control for them (even as I can never be fully cognizant of my own motivations, or even of my shifting self-understanding over time).

Central to my approach is a deep respect for the subjects of my study, both ancient and modern, that leads to—and from—a rather innately conservative impulse regarding my subject matter, which has in turn led me to embrace postcolonial theory and rhetoric, as well as other approaches from the postmodern tool box. I do this in order to interpret these same sources and explain them to broad academic audiences. To my mind, all interpretation must take into account both the epigraphy of the inscription and the chemistry of the pigments before proceeding to a nuanced, historiographically sound, and open-ended “thick description.” For this reason, I am deeply excited by recent advances in the study of polychromy in ancient art, an approach that has already changed the ways in which we look at the art of antiquity, including Jewish art.<sup>27</sup> This is a rather natural continuation of my interest in liturgical studies,<sup>28</sup> in which I began to explore polychromy while unaware of the important advances that I am now bringing into the discussion of ancient Judaism. The first fruits of this research, the discovery of the original yellow ocher painting of the menorah on the Arch of Titus in June, 2012, is the most dramatic advance so far in my attempt to see the ancient world, and particularly the ancient Jewish world,<sup>29</sup> as the “carousel of color” that it was.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I am thinking, for example, of the significance of Baron's Austria-Hungarian background for his work (see pp. 203–205 below). Another case was Meyer Schapiro. See Helen Epstein, “Meyer Schapiro: A Passion to Know and to Make Known,” *ART News* (May, 1983): 60–85; (Summer, 1983): 84–95. Many thanks to Miriam Schapiro Grosz for discussing this point with me.

<sup>27</sup> Pp. 51–62; 68–69; 87–100.

<sup>28</sup> Pp. 161–194; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 167–173.

<sup>29</sup> See Steven Fine, “Menorahs in Color: On the Study of Polychromy in Jewish Visual Culture of Roman Antiquity,” *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* 6 (2012): 3–27; Heinrich Piening, “Examination Report: The Polychromy of the Arch of Titus Menorah Relief,” *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* 6 (2012): 28–32.

<sup>30</sup> Referring to the classic television program, which premiered in 1961, “Walt Disney's Carousel of Color.” See J. P. Telotte, *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 53–55.

As my work has developed through the nearly two decades since I completed my doctorate,<sup>31</sup> I have moved away from the social historical “master narratives” that for a while dominated the field of “ancient Judaism” in Anglophone circles, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. These approaches—associated most closely with Goodenough, Smith and Smith’s Jewish Theological Seminary, and in some cases Yeshiva University-trained Columbia University students—are rooted deeply in questions of clerical authority and influence in the modern world that were rife within the mainline Protestant and Jewish Conservative communities, and they project these concerns onto the past.<sup>32</sup> I do not subscribe, for example, to the notion tacitly assumed by some that nonevidence is a form of evidence—thus assuming that a lapse in our data for a particular phenomenon means necessarily that it did not exist.<sup>33</sup> As Neusner put it most starkly, “If you can’t show it, you don’t know it.”<sup>34</sup> This is a strong assumption to make for a period of which we really know so little. Historians of later periods are well aware that phenomena often have long periods of gestation and development before they are expressed in larger cultural forums, including in writing. How much more is this so for Roman antiquity, from which so little in writing—and for that matter, so little of the material culture—has survived?<sup>35</sup>

When the minimalist approach is taken to its extreme, non-data become data, and “uncertainty” and lack of continuity are the “natural” results of scholarship.<sup>36</sup> Most famously, this approach has created a deeply fractured set of terminology, beginning with the rather unaesthetic neologism

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<sup>31</sup> Under the direction of Lee I. Levine and Lawrence Schiffman at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987–1994.

<sup>32</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 36–46. See also Funkenstein, “Jewish History among the Thorns,” 318. For a parallel reappraisal of German Jewish scholarship on the Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), esp. 1–12.

<sup>33</sup> Or as Carl Sagan famously put it, “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” See his *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 213.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Approaches to Ancient Judaism, New Series*, vol. 10 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 32; eadem, “Explaining an Intellectual Autobiography” (address delivered at the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Bologna, January, 2007), 17, [http://www.ias.unibo.it/NR/rdonlyres/65DC4C38-8DB3-4AB2-A2BB-32DC81B22AAA/75376/4\\_ExplainIntellecAutobiog.pdf](http://www.ias.unibo.it/NR/rdonlyres/65DC4C38-8DB3-4AB2-A2BB-32DC81B22AAA/75376/4_ExplainIntellecAutobiog.pdf) (accessed May 2012).

<sup>35</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg, “History and/or Memory: The Origins of the Principle of Accommodation,” in *Thinking Impossibilities: The Intellectual Legacy of Amos Funkenstein*, ed. E. A. Westman and D. Biale (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 193–206, esp. 202.

<sup>36</sup> My most forthright discussion of this point, where I attempt to stake out a cautious middle ground, appears in my review of Shaye J. D. Cohen’s *The Beginnings of Jewishness*:

“Judaisms.” These Judaisms range from Essene Judaism, Enochic Judaism, Pharisaic Judaism, and Sadducean Judaism to Samaritan “Judaism” (as if Samaritans were Jews!) to Diaspora Judaism, Rabbinic Judaism, non-Rabbinic Judaism, and most recently Visual Judaism (I probably missed some).<sup>37</sup> Rather than emphasize “multiplicity” in ancient Judaism—to my mind a search for a denominational (or at least, culturally fractured) past—my preference is to assert a bubbling and energetic “Common Judaism” (E. P. Sanders’ term)<sup>38</sup> or “Jewish *koiné*,” drawing upon Peter Brown’s “Christian *koiné*.”<sup>39</sup> Perhaps for heuristic purposes just “Judaism,” properly problematized, is once again sufficient—fully aware of the fraught and deeply modern construction of this term.<sup>40</sup> Where others have *asserted* diversity, I *see* diversity and consciously (likely subconsciously) seek out evidence of the shared. This predilection is rooted in my upbringing, far from the ideological controversies of the Northeast. I grew up at the end of the era when American Jews belonged to “streams of Judaism” and not to “denominations,” when the bonds of Eastern European Jewish culture were still broadly felt, when a post-Six Day War, post-Holocaust American Judaism asserted kinship across ideological lines, and when most everyone in our then-small Jewish enclave in eastern San Diego stuck together despite all of our differences (a situation reinforced by deed covenants

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*Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), published in *Archaeology Odyssey* 3, no. 6 (2000): 56, 58.

<sup>37</sup> The title of Lee I. Levine’s useful handbook, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), which arrived as this volume was going to press. I was not able to integrate Levine’s insights into this study. See my review of *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity* in *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* 13 (2014).

<sup>38</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), esp. 47–51; eadem, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), esp. 419–428. Stuart S. Miller has recently suggested the utility of calling this approach “Complex Common Judaism.” See his “Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Other Identity Markers of ‘Complex Common Judaism,’” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*, 41 (2010): 214–243.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 173, 179–181, 189–193; Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>40</sup> See Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 3, and the thoughtful reflections of Michael L. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 1–21. See also Seth Schwartz, “How Many Judaisms Were There?: A Critique of Neusner and Smith on Definition and Mason and Boyarin on Categorization,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2, no. 2 (2011): 208–238. For the intellectual history of the term “Judaism” see Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

that legally barred Jews from coastal areas until the late 1960s).<sup>41</sup> These instincts are given expression today through my active membership in the Modern Orthodox community, through my deep commitment to Jewish community and peoplehood beyond ideologies, my Zionist proclivities and on an institutional level in my current position as professor of Jewish history at Yeshiva University. While often insightful, the social historical approach to what is routinely called “rabbinic Judaism”<sup>42</sup> has generally attained its goal of contextualizing the social status of the rabbis. More than that, the modernist social function that this approach served within elements of American Judaism—particularly in the Washington-Boston corridor—is no longer the “hot button” issue that it once was.

In a world where the changing nature of “Jewish identity”—in the present and hence in the past—is now a preoccupation,<sup>43</sup> issues of “rabbinic authority” are moving into the background. Not surprisingly, recent years have seen a sharp increase in academic studies of Jewish identity. Shaye J. D. Cohen’s *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (2001),<sup>44</sup> to some degree Seth Schwartz’s *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BC to 640 CE* (2001),<sup>45</sup> and now Hayim Lapin’s *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE*<sup>46</sup> pursue these issues from within the “rabbinic movement” model developed by the Smith community. Others have pursued these questions under the rubric of the “the ways that never parted,” the relationship between Judaism

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<sup>41</sup> Stan Schwartz and Laurel Schwartz, “San Diego,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd edition (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 18:12–15; Mary Ellen Stratthaus, “Flaw in the Jewel: Housing Discrimination Against Jews in La Jolla, California,” *American Jewish History*, 84, no. 3 (1996): 189–219.

<sup>42</sup> I spoke on the history of this term and its application to the religion of the rabbis at a conference at American Jewish University in Los Angeles, February 26, 2012, “Underground Traditions: Archaeology, The Unknown Arts, and the Esoteric Lore of Ancient Judaism.”

<sup>43</sup> The literature on this phenomenon is massive, particularly in recent years. A search of the term “Jewish identity” on Amazon.com resulted in 1,214 hits while the database *Rambi: The Index of Articles on Jewish Studies* ([http://aleph.nli.org.il/F?local\\_base=rmb01](http://aleph.nli.org.il/F?local_base=rmb01)) listed a full 646 academic articles (accessed December, 2012). Some significant works on contemporary Jewish identity include Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Joshua Eli Plaut, *A Kosher Christmas: 'Tis the Season to Be Jewish* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Yoel Finkelman, *Strictly Kosher Reading: Popular Literature and the Condition of Contemporary Orthodoxy* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011); Shaul Magid, *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> See n. 36 above.

<sup>45</sup> Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, and see my review at [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/8549\\_9369.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/8549_9369.pdf).

and Christianity in antiquity serving in part as a cipher for questions of identity in our own world.<sup>47</sup> *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, written from the perspective of cultural history, focused upon ways that Jews participated in the visual cultures of their places and times becoming inculturated to the general culture and transforming it in terms of their distinct (and sometimes indistinct) minority identities in the long period from the Maccabees to Mohammed.

Recently Alexei M. Sivertsev has focused squarely on literature from the cusp of the seventh century, exploring the extent to which Jews were inculturated to the social and mythic structures of Byzantine imperial culture.<sup>48</sup> His project focuses upon the liminal period that scholars of Late antique/Byzantine studies, Islamic studies and Jewish studies have until recently treated as a kind of black hole, or “netherworld.”<sup>49</sup> This pivotal period, when Byzantium was replaced in the East by Islamic rule, was justifiably called an “Age of Transition” in a recent Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition.<sup>50</sup> This exhibition, to which I contributed “Jews and Judaism under *Byzantium and Islam*” (chapter 12), tacitly responds to the “conflict of empires” rhetoric that became prominent in some American political discourse after 9/11 by asserting commonality. The focus on times of “transition”—from Roman religion to imperial Christianity on one end and, more vitally today, from Byzantine Christianity to Islam on the other—permeates this and three other recent exhibitions. All but one were presented—not insignificantly—at institutions on or near New York’s Fifth Avenue a decade after 9/11, in late 2011–2012.<sup>51</sup> This concern with

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<sup>47</sup> Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), and below. See my “The Parting of the Ways: From Melito to Mohammed,” in *Partings—How Judaism and Christianity Became Two*, ed. H. Shanks, forthcoming.

<sup>48</sup> Alexei M. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Beth Berkowitz, “Review of Alexei M. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*,” *AJS Review* 37, no. 1 (2013): 146.

<sup>50</sup> *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition (7th–9th Century)*, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, March 14–July 8, 2012, catalog edited by H. C. Evans, with B. Ratliff (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century AD*, Onassis Cultural Center, New York, December 7, 2011–May 14, 2012, [http://onassisusa.org/exhibition\\_transitions.php?m=3&h=3](http://onassisusa.org/exhibition_transitions.php?m=3&h=3) (accessed May 2012), and the catalog, ed. A. Lazaridou (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2011); and my review of *Dura Europos: Crossroads of Antiquity*, exhibition at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College, February 5–June 5, 2011, and *Edge of Empires: Pagans, Jews and Christians*



peaceful “transition” is today associated with Peter Brown’s “Late Antiquity” movement, which in recent decades has developed as the American “master narrative” for the history of this period, and to a degree has integrated Judaic studies.<sup>52</sup> This model of “happy” coexistence was developed in Jewish studies by Salo Baron and his students beginning during the “Roaring Twenties,” and still has considerable currency. In Art history it was developed by Kurt Weitzmann and his students—at first in response to German National Socialism.<sup>53</sup> As useful as this shared approach is, it ultimately tells us as much about fervent hopes for communal harmony during a turbulent century—and, in contemporary terms, after 9/11—as it does about the deep commonality and complexity of intercommunal relations and power inequalities that distinguished the place of Jewish communities in the worlds of Rome, New Rome, and early Islam.

At the same time, the so-called “linguistic turn” in historical writing, as applied to ancient Judaism, has had the benefit of focusing us on the text and its internal rhetoric as a preliminary step toward historical writing.<sup>54</sup> The downside, however, is that literary explication—the first step toward historical interpretation and narrativization—is sometimes the last step. My discussion of the Temple menorah after 70 CE focuses on this problem in particular. At the opposite extreme, my discussions of Helios in ancient synagogue mosaics and of priests in synagogues respond to the over-historicization of artifacts and literary sources that, in my opinion, has preceded thorough contextualization—in effect asking artifacts to be more gregarious than they are capable of. I continue to be deeply uncomfortable with scholarship that quickly and unproblematically foregrounds Christianity, the majority culture within which most scholars of Jewish studies thrive, hiring and tenure decisions are made, and whose questions have long animated that discipline.<sup>55</sup> I approach this problem

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at *Roman Dura-Europos*, exhibition at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, September 23, 2011–January 8, 2012, in *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74, no. 4 (2011): 246–249.

<sup>52</sup> See Peter Brown’s review of this exhibition, “The Great Transition,” *New York Review of Books*, May 10, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> See pp. 200–201 below.

<sup>54</sup> On this turn see, most eloquently, Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> See the incisive historiographic discussions of Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*; Oded I. Irshai, “Ephraim E. Urbach and the Study of Judeo-Christian Dialogue in Late Antiquity—Some Preliminary Observations,” in *How Should Late Antique Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World? Hermeneutical Limits and Possibilities*,

in chapter II, which focuses my historiographic gaze on a column drum fragment upon which a menorah was first inscribed, to be obscured later by a cross emblazoned over and above it. My concerns are especially relevant in an age when—astonishingly—the treasures of Zoroastrianism are just now being exploited for the study of Sasanian Jewry<sup>56</sup> and Samaritan-Jewish studies are still in their early stages.<sup>57</sup>

To sum up: The issues raised in *Art, History, and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity* are larger than any of the terms that frame the title alone. This book is about the interplay of thing, text, and thought in the ways that we model the past—and thus as much a “thick description” of ourselves as of antiquity. For that reason, I began this chapter with *The Talmudist*, and end it now with a model of an ancient synagogue, which serves as the cover illustration of this volume (Figure 4). This three-dimensional “dollhouse” presents a cross-section of the sixth-century Beth Alpha synagogue, a small rural synagogue on the outskirts of Byzantine Beit Shean/Scythopolis in Israel’s Jezreel Valley that became central to all discussions of “Jewish art” immediately upon its discovery in late 1928 and in early 1929. This large model was imagined by the first true historian of Jewish art, Rachel Wischnitzer, in 1972, and reflects her understanding of this now-monumental village synagogue. There are elements of this model that today, forty years later, I might change. After all, we now have discovered all of the elements of the Torah shrine panel of this mosaic—arks from the Galilean synagogues of Nabratein and Chorazin, menorahs from Hammath Tiberias and Maon in southern Judea, and lions from Baram in the Upper Galilee and En Samsam in the Golan Heights.

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ed. M. Kraus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 167–198; Israel J. Yuval, “Yitzhak Baer and the Search for Authentic Judaism,” in *The Jewish Past Revisited; Reflections on Modern Jewish Historian*, ed. D. N. Myers and D. B. Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 77–87; eadem, “Christianity in Talmud and Midrash: Parallelomania or Parallelophobia,” in *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, ed. F. T. Harkins (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 50–64, and my comments below, pp. 206–211.

<sup>56</sup> See Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Institute, 1990), 137–148; eadem, “Babylonian Rabbinic Culture,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. D. Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 225–265; Yaakov Elman, “Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. C. E. Fonrobert and M. S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165–197; Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Context, History, and Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> I discuss these issues in my “Samaritan Folklore,” *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, ed. R. Patai and H. Bar-Itzhak (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2013), 2:464–467.





Figure 4. Model of the Beth Alpha synagogue, 1972 (courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum).

I would certainly reconstruct the ark within the apse—which Eleazar L. Sukenik already proposed in his 1932 publication (Figure 5)—as I did in a full-sized model using synagogue spolia for the exhibition *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue* in 1996 (Figure 6).<sup>58</sup> Apparently the evidence in 1972 was not convincing enough for Mrs. Wischnitzer (as she is still universally called) to allow this level of conjecture into her model. Similarly, while I am deeply sympathetic to Wischnitzer’s decision to people the synagogue, I would not today place a lone woman in the balcony as she did, implying that it was an area reserved for women exclusively. The place of women in ancient (and modern) synagogues was central to Jewish communal dialogue—and hence to scholarly discussion—during the years just after the model was made. To Wischnitzer, a beloved professor at Yeshiva University’s Stern College for Women, as to almost all scholars at the time, it was perfectly obvious that the balcony was the women’s section, the *ezrat nashim*. “My” model would be sensitive to the

<sup>58</sup> E. L. Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1932); Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 194.

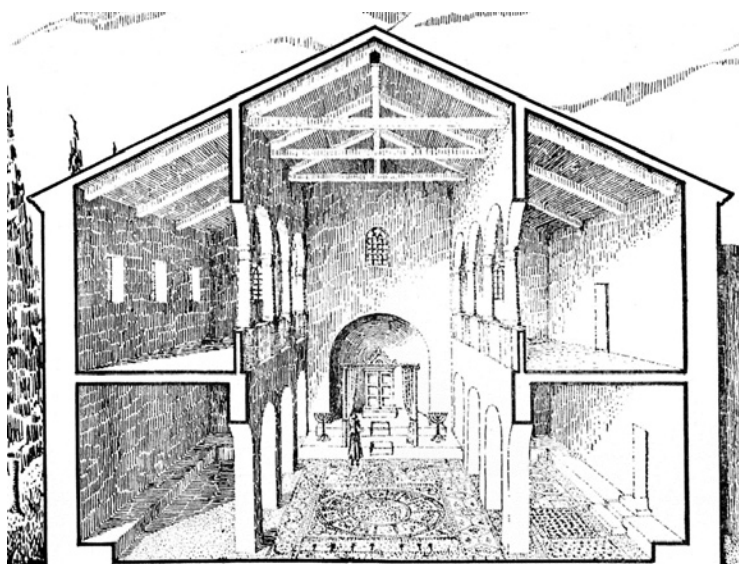


Figure 5. Reconstruction drawing of the Beth Alpha synagogue by Jacob Pinkersfield (after E. L. Sukenik, *The Synagogue of Beth Alpha* [Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1932], 7).

likely possibility that the balcony might not have been a women's section.<sup>59</sup> In short, the Beth Alpha model represents a major scholar's best guess, at a particular historical moment, at what the Beth Alpha synagogue—and by extension, “ancient Judaism”—looked like. This transient model is an excellent place from which to undertake my own modeling of the past, as a window on our own present, and a balcony from which to await the further contextualization of my own work.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel Safrai, “Was there a Women's Section in the Ancient Synagogue?” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 32 (1963): 329–338; Chana Safrai, “Women in the Ancient Synagogue,” in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*, ed. S. Grossman and R. Haut (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 39–49; Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 475–477.



Figure 6. *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World, 1996*, “Ancient Synagogue Bema,” built from spolia and facsimilies of artifacts from various synagogues in Israel. Foreground: the Meroth synagogue mosaic. Left: model of the Beth Alpha synagogue (courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum).



## CHAPTER ONE

### “SEE, I HAVE CALLED THE *RENOWNED* NAME OF BEZALEL, SON OF URI . . .”: JOSEPHUS’S PORTRAYAL OF THE BIBLICAL “ARCHITECT”



Figure 7. Bas-relief of a building site, Terracina (after Jean-Pierre Adam, *Roman Building: Materials and Techniques*, trans. A. Mathews [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994], 45).

Bezalel son of Uri, literally “in the shadow of God, son of light,” is a unique character in the Hebrew Bible. He is the divinely charged chief craftsman of the Tabernacle. According to Scripture (Exodus 31–38), Bezalel was given “wisdom,” “understanding,” and “knowledge” to pursue this task—a level of creative capacity reserved for God alone in the rest of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Since biblical times, Bezalel has served as a kind of touchstone for reflection upon the significance of artistic inspiration as well as the public role and status of craftsmen. Indeed, from the Renaissance to the present, Bezalel has been largely transformed into the artist-hero *par excellence*, the precursor and peer of Michelangelo and Raphael.<sup>2</sup> In the ongoing polemics between Protestants and Catholics in early modern and modern Europe and North America, both sides have frequently invoked Bezalel. At the turn of the twentieth century, cultural Zionism made him into a prophetic artist-hero, the patron of a new Jewish art for a nation conceived

<sup>1</sup> This point is made by Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1952), 281.

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. G. Bull (London: Penguin, 1987), 1:26–27.

by many to be without artistic capacity,<sup>3</sup> while in contemporary America, evangelical Christians have turned to Bezalel to legitimize a new flowering of Protestant figurative art.<sup>4</sup>

In my previous work, Josephus's Bezalel served as an example of the general disparagement common among Greco-Roman *literati* (including, to some degree, rabbis) of craftsmen and craftsmanship.<sup>5</sup> The Josephan Bezalel illustrated a sentiment that the pioneer scholar Alison Burford described in 1972, with what I now know to be considerable overstatement: "No matter how useful or how beautiful the object, how essential to the physical or spiritual needs of the individual or community for whom it was made—be it hunting-knife, defense tower, or gold and ivory cult statue—the maker was in no way admirable."<sup>6</sup> Scholars have shown significant interest in Roman architects, beginning with the writings of the architect Vitruvius,<sup>7</sup> and then combing the literary and epigraphic corpora for the rather scarce evidence of elite architects that they preserve.<sup>8</sup> Recently Serefina Cuomo, following Burford, has shown that craftsmen of somewhat lower status were not as invisible as we might think from the writings of the literary elite, pointing out counterreadings of familiar texts and the funerary remains of craftsmen whose tombs were proudly adorned with images of the tools of their trade.<sup>9</sup> None of these students of Roman antiquity has made use of the evidence within Josephus's oeuvre for the study of architects and craftsmen during the first century, even

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<sup>3</sup> Boris Schatz, *Jerusalem Rebuilt: The Dream and its Fulfillment* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Beney Bezalel, 1918). See now Jess Olson, "Jerusalem Rebuilt: The Temple in the Fin-de-siècle Zionist Imagination," in *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to the Messiah*, ed. S. Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 329–348.

<sup>4</sup> Gene E. Veith, *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 67, 100–102.

<sup>6</sup> Alison Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Vitruvius Pollio, *On Architecture*, ed. F. Krohn. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1912); translated by I. D. Rowland and T. N. Howe, *Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> See James C. Anderson, *Roman Architecture and Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 3–67; William L. MacDonald, *Architecture of the Roman Empire: I. An Introductory Study*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 122–142; M. W. Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), esp. 19–39, and the bibliographies in each book.

<sup>9</sup> Serefina Cuomo, *Technology and Culture in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131–164. See too Meir Ayali, *Workers and Craftsmen: Their Labor and Their Status in Rabbinic Literature* [Hebrew] (Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1987).



though Josephus's works were written in Rome, under the patronage of the Flavian emperors.<sup>10</sup> Undergirding contemporary scholarly interest in craftsmen is a developing concern within our larger culture for the state of craftsmanship and a perceived collective loss of dexterity in the manual arts.<sup>11</sup> With this background, I return to the Josephan Bezalel, with the intention of integrating the previously underappreciated contribution of Flavius Josephus into the general conversation on craftsmen in the Greco-Roman world.

Bezalel appears in the context of Josephus's description of the biblical Tabernacle in *Ant.* 3.104–106:

τούτων οὖν κατὰ σπουδὴν συγκομισθέντων ἑκάστου καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν φιλοτιμησαμένου, ἀρχιτέκτονας τοῖς ἔργοις ἐφίστησι κατ' ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ οὕς καὶ τὸ πλῆθος ἂν ἐπελέξατο τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐπ' αὐτῷ γενομένης. τὰ δὲ ὀνόματα αὐτῶν, καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς βίβλοις ἀναγγέλλονται, ταῦτ' ἦν: Βασάηλος [ μὲν] Οὐρί παῖς τῆς Ἰούδα φυλῆς, υἱὸς δὲ Μαρίας τῆς ἀδελφῆς τοῦ στρατηγοῦ, Ἐλίβαζος δὲ Ἰσαμάχου Δανίδος φυλῆς. τὸ δὲ πλῆθος οὕτως ὑπὸ προθυμίας τοῖς ἐγχειρουμένοις ἐπήλθεν, ὥστε Μωυσῆς ἀνείρξεν αὐτοὺς ὑποκηρύξάμενος ἀρκεῖν τοὺς ὄντας: τοῦτο γὰρ οἱ δημιουργοὶ προειρήκεσαν: ἐχώρουν οὖν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς σκηνῆς κατασκευήν.

Now when these had been eagerly brought together, each having contributed even beyond his ability, he appointed *arkhitéktonas* (Whiston and Thackeray:<sup>12</sup> "architects"; Feldman: "construction supervisors") for the works, in accordance with the instruction of God, whom the multitude also would have selected if the authority had been in their power.

Their names, for they have been recorded officially in the sacred books, were these: Basaelos, son of Ouri of the tribe of Ioudas, grandson of Mariamme the sister of the general, and Elibazos, son of Isamachos, of the tribe of Dan.

The multitude made themselves available with such enthusiasm for the undertakings that Moyses curbed them, having proclaimed that those men who were present were sufficient, for the craftsmen had announced this previously. Therefore, they preceded the construction of the Tent.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Mary Beard ("The Triumph of Josephus," in *Flavian Culture: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 543–558) rightly laments the general exclusion of Josephus from the Greco-Roman canon, which she rightly refers to as "Snubbing Josephus" (p. 542).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish Historian*, trans. W. Whiston (London: W. Bowyer, 1737); *Josephus: Works*, vol. 4, trans. Henry St. John Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930).

<sup>13</sup> *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Judean Antiquities 1–4*, trans. Louis Feldman, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 257–258.

This ambivalent description contrasts starkly with the biblical portrayal of Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus 31 and again in Exodus 35. Louis H. Feldman has highlighted some of these distinctions in his larger project of discussing Josephus's Moses. Feldman notes that

Josephus shifts the focus from G-d to Moses in his description of the gifts that the Israelites give for the Tabernacle in the wilderness. In the Bible, the Israelites bring their gifts with gladness of heart toward G-d (Exod. 25:2 and 35:5), whereas their rejoicing is focused on Moses, their general, in Josephus (*Ant.* 3.102). Again, whereas the Bible states that the architectural skills of Bezalel are due to the divine spirit (Exod. 31:3), in Josephus, it is Moses who sets the architects over the project (*Ant.* 3.104). Josephus diminishes the supernatural element in the choice of the architects by saying that although they were chosen by divine command, the same choice would have been made by the people (so also *Berakot* 55a).<sup>14</sup>

Feldman is quite correct in identifying the process whereby Bezalel was transformed from the uniquely gifted chief craftsman of the biblical Tabernacle into a humanly chosen member of a team of architects with popular appeal. In this article I will follow the exegetical steps that led to this reformulation, and the larger Roman literary and cultural environment that underlies Josephus's hermeneutical decisions. I will show that Josephus fashioned the biblical "architect" in the image of elite architects of this own age, carefully avoiding competition with Moses and any possible comparison of Bezalel with Greco-Roman craftsman gods.

The generative point for Josephus's reimagining of Bezalel is found in line 105, "Their names, for they have been recorded officially in the sacred books, were these . . ." This formulation appears nowhere else in Josephus's "rewritten Bible,"<sup>15</sup> and thus calls immediate attention to itself. Why is the record of Bezalel and Oholiab, preserved "officially in the sacred books," of note when this is applicable to the every biblical character that Josephus describes or ignores? This apparently apologetic statement seems to respond to Exodus 31:2, "Behold, I have *called by the name* of Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur of the tribe of Judah." It is this biblical "call" and especially the explicit mention of his "name" that creates the rub, and hence Josephus's special attention to Bezalel. In fact, Josephus elides Bezalel's divine call altogether, simply erasing it. He focuses in on a kind of human

<sup>14</sup> Louis H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 426.

<sup>15</sup> A category identified by Geza Vermes, which has become widely accepted. See his *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1983).



call "by name," which becomes a kind of popular acclimation. Our author apparently rereads the divine call "by the name of Bezalel" as a human call "by the *renowned* name of Bezalel." This is how the rabbis later took the verse, placing it within a wide-ranging discussion of what it meant for an individual to possess public "renown."<sup>16</sup> *Targum Neofiti*, a late antique Aramaic paraphrase of the Pentateuch, for example, translates, "See, Moses, that I have appointed (alternate version: "remembered") and called by the *good* name of our master Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur,"<sup>17</sup> using the same terminology generally used in rabbinic texts and late antique Palestinian synagogue dedicatory inscriptions for renowned members of society.<sup>18</sup>

Bezalel's "renowned name" goes beyond any personal traits, however. It is based on imagined family lineage. According to Exodus 31:2 and parallels, Bezalel was the "grandson of Hur." Hur is prominent early in the book of Exodus, but this character disappears after the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17), where he helped to support Moses' arms and thus ensured the Israelite victory. Bezalel carries on Hur's presence in the Exodus saga. This descent from Hur is significant enough that 1 Chronicles 2:19 includes his genealogy: "Caleb married Ephrath, who bore him Hur. Hur begot Uri, and Uri gave birth to Bezalel."<sup>19</sup> Bezalel's already exalted lineage was apparently not sufficient for Josephus (or his sources), who introduces him as "Basaelos, son of Ouri of the tribe of Ioudas, grandson of Mariamme the sister of the general [that is, Moses]," eliding Hur altogether and explicitly identifying Bezalel as a member of Moses' extended family. This lineage follows on *Ant.* 3.54, where Josephus identifies Hur as the son of Caleb and Miriam in his retelling of Exodus 17, the battle with Amalek. Paraphrasing

<sup>16</sup> E.g., m. Avot 4:13, following on Eccl 7:1. On Bezalel in rabbinic sources, see Louis Ginzberg, "Bezalel in Rabbinical Literature," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), 3:135; *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Yannai* [Hebrew], ed. Z. M. Rabinovitz (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1985–1987), 1:349–353.

<sup>17</sup> *Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense Ms de la Biblioteca Vaticana*, ed. A. Díez Macho (Madrid and Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968), ad loc. On the dates of the Palestinian *targumim*, see Phillip S. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Mikra*, ed. M. J. Mulder (Assen: Van Gorgum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 217–253; Avigdor Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum: The Aggadah in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), esp. 11–43.

<sup>18</sup> See Joseph Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Israel: Maariv, 1978), passim.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus Rabba 40, 4; Targum to 1 Chronicles 2:19, 4:4, ed. A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), part 4a, 5, 6; and M. Seligsohn, "Hur: Biblical Data," and Louis Ginzberg and J. Jacobs, "Hur in Rabbinical Literature," both in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 6:506.

Exodus 17, Josephus writes that Moses “told his brother Aaron and Hur, their sister Miriam’s husband, to stand on each side of him and take hold of his hands.” The association of Hur with Miriam creates both familial symmetry at Exodus 17 and explains the presence of Hur in such a pivotal role. Rabbinic sources reach a similar conclusion, identifying Miriam with Ephrath of 1 Chronicles 2:19.<sup>20</sup> Eliding Hur, Josephus focuses on Miriam, emphasizing Bezalel’s close familial relationship with Moses. The building of the Tabernacle is thus kept in Moses’ family. This focus upon Moses’ family rests on biblical precedent, where Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are the chief actors of the Exodus narrative. This biblical precedent fits well with the general Roman context, where the organs of state—and its major building projects—were commonly entrusted to relatives and friends of the emperor. Paul Zanker notes that “whereas Augustus personally took charge of the building of sanctuaries, for secular projects he let himself be assisted by both family members and friends.”<sup>21</sup> Vespasian, the “new Augustus,” and his sons were deeply involved in their massive building projects in Rome and beyond, including the Coliseum, the Temple of Peace, the Arch of Titus, and the *Domus Flavia*.<sup>22</sup>

In Josephus’s retelling, Bezalel and Oholiab are depicted as partners—“renowned” ones, to be sure—in the Tabernacle project. The “call” of Bezalel is broadened to include Oholiab. The Masoretic text of Exodus 31 provides no support for this equation, as there Oholiab is clearly Bezalel’s assistant: “Moreover, I have assigned to/with him (*itto*) . . .” (Exodus 31:6). The Septuagint, however, reads: “And I have appointed him and (*kai*) Eliab,” creating a sense of equality between the craftsmen. The Masoretic text and the Septuagint to Exodus 36:1–2 present warrant to suggest equality between Bezalel and Oholiab. The Masoretic text translates: “Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom the Lord has endowed . . .” Based upon these raw materials, Josephus constructs a team of “renowned” craftsmen.

No noun is used in Scripture to refer to the profession of Bezalel and Oholiab. Josephus, by contrast, calls them *arkhitéktonas*. It appears that he (or his sources) extrapolated this title from a tradition that finds voice in

<sup>20</sup> Ginzberg and Jacobs, “Hur in Rabbinical Literature.”

<sup>21</sup> Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. A. Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 139.

<sup>22</sup> See Robin Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels: Latomus, 1996), and the essays collected by Filippo Coarelli, *Divus Vespasianus: Il bimillenario dei Flavi* (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Soprintendenza speciale per i beni archeologici di Roma; Milan: Electa, 2009).

the Septuagint translation of Exodus 31:3–4.<sup>23</sup> The Masoretic text of this verse is translated:<sup>24</sup> "I have endowed him [Bezalel] with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft to think thoughts to make (*la-ḥashov maḥshavot la-asot*)<sup>25</sup> in gold, silver and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood—to work in every kind of craft." The section that I have underlined and translated rather awkwardly as "to think thoughts to make" has encumbered translators since antiquity owing to its complex series of infinitive verbs.<sup>26</sup> The Septuagint attempts to smooth this text out, translating this phrase by adding the verb *arkhitektoneō*. There we read: *diavoeîsthai kai arkhitektoneîn, ergázesthai tò khrusíon*,<sup>27</sup> "to be designing and to construct, to fashion the gold." T. Muraoka translates *arkhitektoneō* as "to work as a commissioner of building" and "to design and construct," though my sense is that in the texts under discussion the term "fabricate" might be more exact here than "construct."<sup>28</sup> *Arkhitektoneîn* is similarly injected by the Septuagint into Exodus 37:21 (parallel to Masoretic 38:23) in its description of Oholiab's work. There this term simplifies "a rather complex series of appositional phrases" that appear in the Hebrew. "The G[reek]... has simplified the grammar by placing the translation of the last appositional phrase [of the Hebrew] in a relative clause."<sup>29</sup> Thus, "at his side Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, carver and designer and embroiderer in blue, scarlet, and crimson yarns and in fine linen" becomes "at his side Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, who constructed the woven things and the needlework and the embroidered things, to weave with scarlet and linen."

<sup>23</sup> Louis H. Feldman notes correctly that "even when Josephus agrees with the Septuagint, there is no guarantee that this is because he had the text of the Septuagint before him, since such an agreement might well be due to an exegetical tradition which he happened to know and which had been incorporated earlier by the translators of the Septuagint." Feldman, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 458.

<sup>24</sup> Following *Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), henceforth *NJPS*, except for the underlined section.

<sup>25</sup> *New JPS Translation*: "make designs for work."

<sup>26</sup> *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, trans. L. J. Perkins, ed. A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Exodus*, ed. J. W. Wevers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 69.

<sup>29</sup> M. L. Wade, *Consistency of Translation Techniques in the Tabernacle Accounts of Exodus in the Old Greek* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 203 n. 102.

The verb *arkhitektoneô* yields the noun *arkhitektôn*, the source of our term “architect.” In Greek and Roman literature, *arkhitektôn* denotes a “master artisan/craftsman,” or “master builder,” though in fact this term refers to a very broad professional range, from the low-level *arkhitektôn* all the way up to elite architects. These usages carried over into early modern English usages for the term “architect,” which was a somewhat broader and more inclusive category.<sup>30</sup> This explains why William Whiston (1732), and H. St. John Thackeray (1927) after him, translated *arkhitektôn* in our Josephus passage as “architect,” while Ralph Marcus (1963)<sup>31</sup> chose “master-builder” and more recent English-language translators, apparently sensing, as Marcus did, the anachronism of using the term “architect,” have tried the no more precise—though certainly less grand—“construction supervisors,”<sup>32</sup> “foremen,”<sup>33</sup> and “supervising tradesmen.”<sup>34</sup>

Josephus was aware of other terms for craftsmen, and his choice of terminology was purposeful. In *Ant.* 7.66 he writes that Hiram of Tyre promised David *tekhnítas ándras téktonas kai oikodómous*, “craftsmen, men skilled in wood, and builders.” In *Ant.* 8.76–78 Josephus refers to Hiram/Huram-Abi, the craftsman of the Solomonic Temple (1 Kings 7:13–14; 2 Chronicles 2:12–13) as a *tekhnitês*, one who “was skilled in all kinds of work, but was especially expert in working gold, silver, and bronze, and it was he who constructed all the things about the Temple in accordance with the king’s will.”<sup>35</sup> While well skilled, however, Josephus’s Cheiromos was a craftsman involved in decorating the Solomonic Temple, and not charged with tasks that might qualify him as an “architect.” Josephus goes out of his way to provide this craftsman with a wholly Jewish genealogy, something that he lacks in Scripture, and makes him markedly inferior to the well-connected Bezalel. In describing Bezalel and Oholiab as “architects,” Josephus was clearly setting them higher in the Greco-Roman hierarchy of craftspeople than the scriptural craftsman who was most like them, Hiram/Huram-Abi.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “architect” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Trans. R. Marcus, 6:186–187.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. L. Feldman.

<sup>33</sup> *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Judean Antiquities 8–10*, trans. T. Begg and P. Spilsbury (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Life of Josephus*, trans. S. Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 87, §157.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus uses this term in similar ways in *Ant.* 10.101; 12.35, 84; 20.219; *War* 3.503.

<sup>36</sup> See my discussion of these traditions in *Fine, Art and Judaism*, 67–68.

Building on traditions preserved in the Masoretic and Septuagint versions, Josephus (or his sources) found the raw materials for his construction of Bezalel and Oholiab as a team of renowned "architects"—masters of the building trade—designers and fabricators who served as general contractors to their patron, Moses. Bezalel, with his elite lineage—and through adhesion mediated by the Septuagint's use of verbs, Oholiab as well—is constructed as comparable to the upper crust of Roman elite architects. By and by Josephus normalized the biblical "architects" to the professional positions that most paralleled the tasks ascribed by Scripture to Bezalel and Oholiab in his own world.

The ideal attributes of Roman elite architects are presented in great detail by the late republican architect Vitruvius, who composed his *On Architecture* and presented it to the young emperor Augustus.<sup>37</sup>

Architecti est scientia pluribus disciplinis et variis eruditionibus ornata, cuius iudicio probantur omnia quae ab ceteris artibus perficiuntur opera. ea nascitur ex fabrica et ratiocinatione. fabrica est continuata ac trita usus meditatio, quae manibus perficitur e materia cuiuscumque generis opus est ad propositum deformationis. ratiocinatio autem est, quae res fabricatas solertiae ac rationis pro demonstrare atque explicare potest.

Itaque architecti, qui sine litteris contenderant, ut manibus essent exercitati, non potuerunt efficere, ut haberent pro laboribus auctoritatem; qui autem ratiocinationibus et litteris solis confisi fuerunt, umbram non rem persecuti videntur. at qui utrumque perdidicerunt, uti omnibus armis ornati citius cum auctoritate, quod fuit propositum, sunt adsecuti.

Cum in omnibus enim rebus, tum maxime etiam in architectura haec duo insunt: quod significatur et quod significat. significatur proposita res, de qua dicitur; hanc autem significat demonstratio rationibus doctrinarum explicata. quare videtur utraque parte exercitatus esse debere, qui se architectum profiteatur. itaque eum etiam ingeniosum oportet esse et ad disciplinam docilem; neque enim ingenium sine disciplina aut disciplina sine ingenio perfectum artificem potest efficere. et ut litteratus sit, peritus graphidos, eruditus geometria, historias complures noverit, philosophos diligenter audierit, musicam scierit, medicinae non sit ignarus, responsa iurisconsultorum noverit, astrologiam caelique rationes cognitas habeat.

The architect's expertise is enhanced by many disciplines and various sorts of knowledge, all the works executed using these other skills are evaluated by his seasoned judgment. This expertise is born both of practice and of reasoning. Practice is the constant, repeated exercise of the hands by which the work is brought to completion in whatever medium is required for the

<sup>37</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, ed. F. Krohn, 1.1.1–3; trans. by Rowland and Howe, *Ten Books on Architecture*, 21–22.

proposed design. Reasoning, however, is what can demonstrate and explain the proportions of completed works skillfully and systematically.

The architects who strove to obtain practical manual skills but lacked an education have never been able to achieve an influence equal to the quality of their exertions, on the other hand, those who placed their trust entirely in theory and in writing seem to have chased after a shadow, not something real. But those who have fully mastered both skills, armed, if you will, in full panoply, those architects have reached their goal more quickly and influentially.

In all things, but especially in architecture, there are two inherent categories: the signified and the signifier. The signified is the proposed subject of discussion, it is signified by a reasoned demonstration carried out according to established principles of knowledge. Thus we see that whoever puts himself forward as an architect should be practiced in both. And furthermore he ought to have a native talent, and be amenable to learning the disciplines [of the profession]. For neither native talent without learning nor learning without native talent create the master craftsman. To be educated, he must be an experienced draftsman, well versed in geometry, familiar with history, a diligent student of philosophy, know music, have some acquaintance with medicine, understand the rulings of legal experts, and have a clear grasp of astronomy and the ways of Heaven.

Vitruvius goes on to explain the relevance of each of these fields of expertise to the work of an architect. A unique sculptural relief of the age of Augustus discovered at the port of Terracina, south of Rome, portrays an elite architect “holding a scroll of drawings or specifications in one hand” in three separate scenes. In each, the architect oversees the work, with the patron, a “high-ranking official, possibly Agrippa working on behalf of his friend, Augustus, giving him orders” (Figure 7).<sup>38</sup> The portrayals of the ideal architect in Vitruvius and in the Terracina relief well express, I think, the relationship that Josephus imagines between Moses as patron with his nephew-architect and Bezalel’s partner Oholiab. They are highly skilled and knowledgeable across the crafts required in constructing the Tabernacle, even as they oversee the entire project at Moses’ behest.

The names of individual architects are rarely mentioned in Roman literary and epigraphic sources. The fact that Bezalel and Oholiab are given such prominence in Scripture goes against the general Roman approach—and indeed, against Josephus’s predilections elsewhere in his writings.<sup>39</sup> Josephus makes no mention, for example, of the architects responsible

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, *Principles*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> See Anderson, *Roman Architecture and Society*, 15–67.

for either Solomon's Temple or for Herod's Temple.<sup>40</sup> In both portrayals, the entire project is ascribed to the king as the royal benefactor. The depiction of Solomon's Temple follows the biblical text—and Josephus does mention the one named craftsman of the Temple, Hiram/Huram-abi. The description of Herod follows both this biblical precedent and standard Roman practice. Josephus occasionally mentions the anonymous priestly Herodian craftsmen,<sup>41</sup> but never the architects. The invisibility of architects in sources reflecting elite attitudes fits the Roman sense of royal involvement that Herod carefully modeled on the involvement of his own patron, Augustus, in his reconstruction of Rome.<sup>42</sup> No literary or epigraphic source mentions the names of the "architects" of his projects either—except for Vitruvius, who worked on behalf of Augustus late in his life and wrote his own treatise. Only rarely do literary sources mention that the name of the *arkhitektôn* was inscribed or even preserved, and those are seen as a sign of the donor's munificence. Josephus's mention of Bezalel and Oholiab is thus all the more significant, and their status all the more exalted. Had they not been "recorded officially in the sacred books" and particularly "renowned," it is likely that Josephus would have done the natural thing and elided the Tabernacle builders just as he makes no mention of the builders of Herod's Temple and ignores issues that are inconvenient or not useful to his narrative.<sup>43</sup> Their mention in Scripture is evidence, in Josephus's world, of the virtuoso status of these elite architects and of the Tabernacle that they built. Josephus's Bezalel and Oholiab were thus comparable with the elite architects of Imperial Rome.

The pairing of Bezalel and Oholiab as the joint leaders of the team that built the Tabernacle is consistent with Josephus's presentations of anonymous groups of "architects" elsewhere in his oeuvre. Josephus uses

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<sup>40</sup> For Josephus's descriptions of the Herodian Temple, see *War* 5.184–247, *Ant.* 15.388–425. These differences are discussed by Lee I. Levine, "Josephus' Description of the Jerusalem Temple: 'War,' 'Antiquities,' and Other Sources," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 233–246. See now Peter Schertz and Steven Fine, "Herod's Temple: An Ornament to the Empire," in gen. ed. R. Etlin, *The Cambridge History of World Religious Architecture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> *Ant.* 15.390, 421.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of Rome* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 196; Ehud Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 294–306. Netzer argues that while certainly not an architect, Herod the Great was "the mastermind behind his achievements and innovations" (p. 294) and was completely involved in the planning and execution of his projects.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of this procedure in regard to art and architecture, see Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 60–81.



the noun *arkhitektôn* three more times in his corpus. In *Ant.* 10.55–56 he writes that among the pious acts of the biblical king Josiah in reestablishing Jerusalem, Josiah, like Moses before him, appointed more than one *arkhitektôn* and a team of workers to restore the Jerusalem temple:

κομισθέντων δὲ τῶν χρημάτων τῆς ἐπιμελείας τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τῆς εἰς τοῦτο δαπάνης προύστησε τὸν τ' ἐπὶ τῆς πόλεως Ἀμασίαν καὶ τὸν γραμματέα Σαφᾶν καὶ τὸν γραφέα τῶν ὑπομνημάτων Ἰωάτην καὶ τὸν ἀρχιερέα Ἐλιακίαν, οἱ μηδὲν ὑπερθέσει μηδὲ ἀναβολὴν δόντες ἀρχιτέκτονας καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα πρὸς τὴν ἐπισκευὴν χρήσιμα παρασκευάσαντες εἶχοντο τῶν ἔργων. καὶ ὁ μὲν ναὸς οὕτως ἐπισκευασθεὶς τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως εὐσέβειαν φανεράν ἐποίησεν.

When the monies were brought, he entrusted responsibility for the sanctuary and its expenses to Amasias, who was over the city, the scribe Saphas, Joates, the keeper of the records, and the high priest Eliakias. These men permitted no delay or postponement; having readied *arkhitéktonas* (Whiston: architects; Marcus: master-builders; Begg and Spilsbury: foremen) and everything useful for the repair, they applied themselves to the work. The sanctuary that had been thus repaired made clear the king's piety.<sup>44</sup>

Here the preparation of architects and the provision of workmen is a feature of royal involvement in the pious construction. In *Ant.* 19.10 Josephus writes of plural *arkhitéktonas* in a general Roman context. Josephus describes what he considers to be Gaius Caligula's egregious order that a statue of Jupiter Olympus, the work of renowned sculptor Phidias of Athens,<sup>45</sup> should be taken from the temple of Zeus in Olympia and brought to Rome. Josephus implicitly suggests that this impiety, which parallels for him Gaius's later attempt to install his own statue in the Jerusalem temple, was foiled by the "architects" in charge of the temple. He writes that "the architects told Memmius Regulus,<sup>46</sup> who was commanded to remove that statue of Jupiter, that the workmanship was such as would be spoiled, and would not bear the removal." Josephus describes a team of at least two local architects, who undertook a professional curatorial role of protecting the Phidias statue and worked through the regional governor to countermand Caligula's decree. The "architects" described by Josephus, from the Tabernacle "architects" to Josiah's "architects" to the "architects" of the Temple of Jupiter Olympus, all have direct access to the ruling elite, and share, presumably, an elite status among architects.

<sup>44</sup> Trans. T. Begg and P. Spilsbury, *Judean Antiquities 8–10* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 223.

<sup>45</sup> A. F. Stuart, "Phidas," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd. ed., ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1158.

<sup>46</sup> E. Badian, "Memmius Regulus, Publius," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd. ed., 955.



In *Life* 155–157 Josephus describes himself in the role of general of the Galilee employing multiple “architects” in his effort to strengthen the walls of Tiberias at the start of the First Jewish Revolt in 66 CE:<sup>47</sup>

Οἱ δὲ τὴν τῶν Τιβεριέων πόλιν κατοικοῦντες γράφουσιν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα παρακαλοῦντες πέμψαι δύναμιν τὴν φυλάξουσιν αὐτῶν τὴν χώραν: θέλειν γὰρ αὐτῷ προστίθεσθαι. κάκείνῳ μὲν ταῦτ' ἔγραφον ἀφικόμενον δὲ με πρὸς αὐτοὺς παρεκάλουν τὰ τεῖχη κατασκευάζειν αὐτοῖς, ὡς ὑπεσχόμην: ἡκηκόεισαν δὲ τὰς Ταριχέας ἤδη τετειχίσθαι. κατανεύσας οὖν ἐγὼ καὶ πάντα τὰ πρὸς τὴν οἰκοδομίαν παρασκευασάμενος τοὺς ἀρχιτέκτονας ἐκέλευον ἐνεργεῖν μετὰ δὲ τρίτην ἡμέραν εἰς Ταριχέας ἀπερχομένου μου...

Now the residents of the city of the Tiberians wrote to the king, appealing to him to send a force that would protect their territory, for they wished to be included with him. Although they were writing these things to him, when I came to them they appealed to me to construct walls for them, as I had promised; and they had heard that Tarichea was already walled. So I agreed, and, after I had prepared everything necessary for the building project, I directed the *arkhitéktonas* (Whiston: “architects”; Thackeray: “foremen”; Mason: “supervising tradesmen”) into action. After the third day [of this], I was making my way off to Tarichea...

Josephus here “made preparation for the entire building” and charged the architects, who numbered at least two, to carry out his orders. He thus behaved like Moses and Josiah of *Antiquities*, and unlike the “evil” emperor Gaius Caligula—though by implication he behaved like the pious emperors, including his patrons, the Flavians. In his self-portrayal, Josephus is to be lauded in terms of Jewish and Roman leadership models. The status of these presumably local “architects” is not clear, whether they were of the more accomplished class, or something less—as Thackeray and Mason assume in their translations. Perhaps Josephus is trying to enhance his own stature by using the same term that he had used for the biblical and Roman provincial architects to describe his own project supervisors. Josephus and apparently his audience were well aware of teams of architects charged by leaders to carry out major building projects—and in the case of Gaius, taking on a curatorial function in relation to those projects. Texts and inscriptions commemorating teams of architects are rare in Greco-Roman sources, though such arrangements might be expected in large projects. Josephus provides powerful evidence that such an arrangement might have been more common than scholars have noted. By pairing

<sup>47</sup> *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Life of Josephus*, trans. and ed. S. Mason, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 87.

Bezalel and Oholiab, Josephus normalizes them to the status of the other architects whom he discusses in his works. Their status is similar to the finest and best-connected “renowned” architects of imperial Rome—but they were certainly not divinely chosen.

Feldman suggests that this diminution of Bezalel relates to the status of Moses, and he is certainly correct. He has shown how carefully Josephus positions Moses as the undisputed leader—the “lawgiver” and “general” of the Exodus generation—while at the same time guarding against any ascription of divinity to him.<sup>48</sup> This was a tall order, as some Roman authors assumed the deification of Moses, and later the Samaritans came far closer to this stance than most Jews did.<sup>49</sup> Bezalel was thus constructed as a personality of lesser status than Moses. This is made exceeding difficult by Bezalel’s biblical call “by name” and thus his singular status as the divinely inspired builder of God’s portable abode. Josephus manages this, as we have seen, by erasing the divine call and Bezalel’s unique possession of the divine attributes of “wisdom,” “understanding,” and “knowledge,” by raising the status of Oholiab, and by forming the two of them into a team in the image of contemporary architects.

What would a curious Roman have seen, though, if confronted with the Septuagint text without Josephus’s elisions and mediation? He might have been puzzled by the status of the divinely called “architect” and his assistant/peer, and then assumed that Bezalel was a kind of divinity himself—less than Moses, but perhaps (with Josephus and later the rabbis) a member of Moses’ family pantheon. Was Bezalel like Hercules at the side of his father Jupiter, or was the lineage of Hur (which in Scripture is something of a loose end) independent and perhaps competing with the descendants of Amram? Was Bezalel to be construed as the equivalent of the craftsmen gods Hephaestus or Daedalus?<sup>50</sup> I am reminded of the image of a procession through the streets of Pompeii that is illustrated

<sup>48</sup> Feldman, *Josephus’s Interpretation of the Bible*, 374–442.

<sup>49</sup> John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Ferdinand Dexinger, “Moses,” in *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*, ed. A. D. Crown, R. Pummer, and A. Tal (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr), 160–162, and the bibliography there. On Second Temple-period Jewish attitudes, see C. Fletcher-Louis, “4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition: The Deification of Moses in Early Christianity,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3 (1996): 236–252, and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>50</sup> F. Graf, “Hephaestus,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd. ed., ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 682; A. F. Stewart, “Daedalus,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd. ed., 425–426, and especially Sarah P. Morris, *Daedalus and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

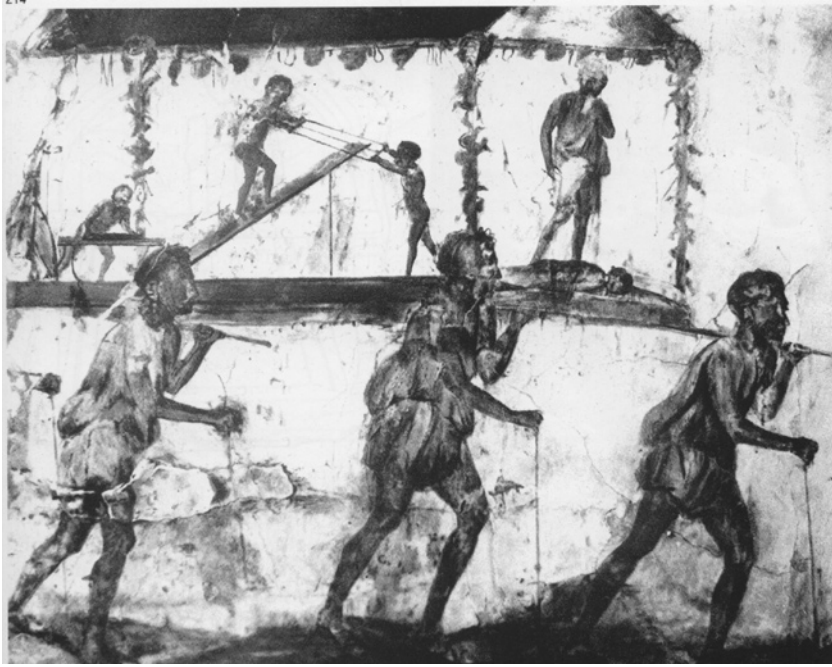


Figure 8. Wall painting of a procession of a guild of carpenters, Pompeii (after Adam, *Roman Building*, 95).

in a preserved wall painting that decorates a carpentry shop in Pompeii (Figure 8). Serafina Cuomo narrates the scene:

Take the festival in honour of Daedalus and his nephew Perdix, who apparently discovered the saw and the compasses, making Daedalus so jealous that he killed him. The festival is depicted in a fresco from a carpenter's workshop in Pompeii: men are carrying a canopy with statues of Daedalus and Perdix, and of men at work with a seesaw and a carpenter's plane.<sup>51</sup>

What if a cult had developed on the basis of the biblical depiction of a divinely "called" and gifted Bezalel? This scenario is not so farfetched. The Canaanite craftsman god Kothar wa-Hassis, whose name translates "skillful and cunning," was still venerated in late antiquity by the descendants of the Phoenicians throughout their diaspora. In later periods he was

<sup>51</sup> Cuomo, *Technology and Culture*, 92. Compare John R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 85–87, who describes the image differently.

referred to as “Koshar and Kotharu,” and boys were even named for the craftsman god in Neo-Punic.<sup>52</sup> Mark S. Smith notes that “like Kothar, [the biblical] Bezalel is given the gift of all workmanship, and his abilities correspond to Kothar’s.”<sup>53</sup> Umberto Cassuto asserts polemical intent in the biblical presentation of Bezalel, arguing, “The qualities attributed by the Canaanites to this god are here [in Exodus] ascribed to flesh and blood.”<sup>54</sup> Cassuto continues: “Scripture comes, as it were, to oppose the Canaanite legends concerning the building of the temples of their gods by one of the deities themselves.” Smith accepts Cassuto’s point, though adding that “the treatment of Bezalel in Exodus 31 suggests an exalted status to one who is otherwise shadowy in the Bible.”<sup>55</sup> It is just this “exalted status” that Josephus—and Cassuto—feels compelled to humanize, by developing the identity of Bezalel in ways compatible with exalted “architects” in his own time. Just as Kothar was responsible for the building of temples, Bezalel, “in the shadow of God, son of Light,” divinely charged master craftsman of the Tabernacle, might still be liable to veneration. The image of Bezalel thus contained within it much to concern Josephus, who went to herculean efforts (pun intended) to domesticate the biblical “architect.”

In this essay, I have focused upon a relatively insignificant biblical character in Josephus’s oeuvre. Feldman rightly framed Bezalel within his larger discussion of Josephus’s Moses. Here I have focused further on Josephus’s Bezalel, bringing a philological and cultural microscope to bear on this character in my attempt to understand the depths of Josephus’s artistry and Roman cultural proclivities in the construction of this enigmatic biblical character. Beyond that, I hope to usher this fascinating material into the general conversation on craftsmanship in Greco-Roman antiquity, at a time when the merits of crafts, craftspeople, and craftsmanship within our own culture have reasserted themselves into our own social reality, and the expanse separating most “educated” Westerners from those who build, make, design and oversee the production of tactile objects grows increasingly—and frightfully—wide.

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<sup>52</sup> Dennis Pardee, “Koshar,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 490–491; Mark S. Smith, “Kothar wa-Hasis, The Ugaritic Craftsman God” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> Smith, “Kothar wa-Hasis,” 99.

<sup>54</sup> Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 281.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, “Kothar wa-Hasis,” 100.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A NOTE ON OSSUARY BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD IN FIRST-CENTURY JERUSALEM

The resurrection of the dead has been a major focus of scholarship on the religion of Jews in the Greco-Roman period. This interest is quite natural, owing to the identification in the Acts of the Apostles of resurrection as a determining factor differentiating the Pharisees from the other sects<sup>1</sup> and the rabbis' assertion that "anyone who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead does not have a place in the world to come."<sup>2</sup> This concern also mirrors, of course, later Christian interest in the afterlife and the modern scholarly search in Judaism and polytheistic religions for parallels and antecedents to developments within ancient Christianity. The applicability of this paradigm in the interpretation of ancient art has been called into question. I have argued against it in the interpretation of synagogue art from Dura Europos and in particular from Sepphoris, and others have questioned it in regard to Roman art.<sup>3</sup>

Since the nineteenth century, scholars of ancient Judaism have interpreted Jewish ossuaries in terms of the resurrection/redemption trope.<sup>4</sup>

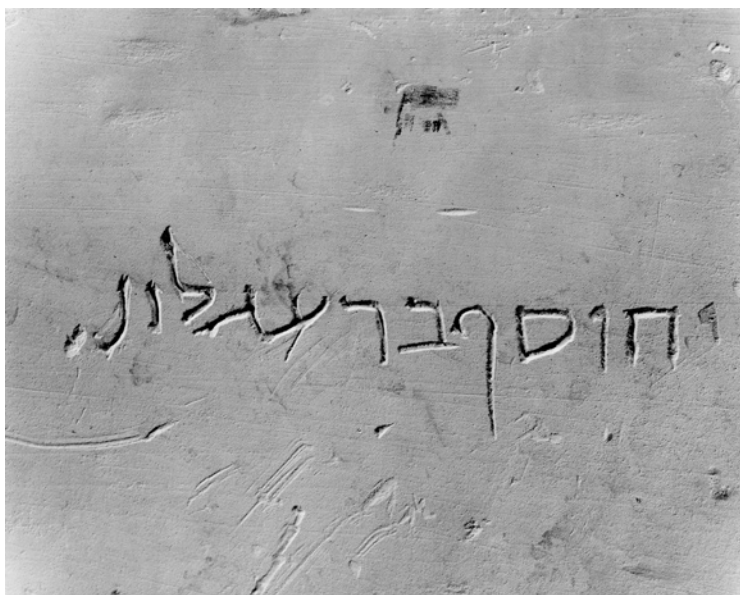
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<sup>1</sup> Acts 23:6–8. On attitudes toward resurrection in first-century Palestinian circles, see Gunther Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 70–73, and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>2</sup> m. Sanhedrin 10:1 and the comments of Chanoch Albeck in his edition, 4:202, 454–455.

<sup>3</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 167–173. See, for example, Peter Schertz in relation to Dionysian motifs on Roman sarcophagi: "Commemorating the Dionysiac" (master's thesis, Department of Art History, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1997), and the bibliography cited there).

<sup>4</sup> See Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth: Secondary Burials in Their Near Eastern Setting* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971), 52–55; L. I. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collection of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994), and the bibliographies cited by each. More recent scholarship on ossuaries includes Dina Teitelbaum, "The Relationship between Ossuary Burial and the Belief in Resurrection during Late Second Temple Period Judaism" (master's thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1997); eadem, "The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon: Cultural Receptivity in Roman Palestine" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2005), 227–315. Many thanks to Dr. Teitelbaum for making her dissertation available to me. See also Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Jodi Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 121–154; Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the*



Figures 9a–b. Ossuary, Jerusalem region, first century. Inscription: Yehosef bar Eglon (courtesy of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore).



Most prominently, they have associated ossuary burial with the Pharisaic and early Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. Briefly, the practice of ossuary burial, as it developed in Jerusalem and its environs in Herodian Jerusalem involved the exhumation of individual skeletons from their resting places within family tombs and the reinternment of these bodies in small chests—usually limestone, but sometimes pottery or wood, known to us as ossuaries and to the ancient rabbis as *geluskama'ot* (singular: *geluskama*).<sup>5</sup> What we now know, and some nineteenth-century scholars could only intuit, is that this practice developed very quickly and without warning in Judaeen society. Previous to this period the exhumation of bones and their placement in charnel piles was the norm. The best example of this practice is the tomb of Jason in western Jerusalem, where the earlier practice was actually discontinued and ossuary burial begun, according to L. I. Rahmani, between 20 and 15 BCE (Figure 10).<sup>6</sup>

The association of ossuaries with Pharisaic beliefs has been accepted and expanded upon by almost all modern interpreters of this phenomenon. The question is whether this is really so, or whether a nineteenth-century scholarly trope is simply being repeated without reevaluation. In this chapter I will explore this question in light of the archaeological record and in light of the literary sources adduced by scholars in support of the claim that ossuary burial was a distinctly Pharisaic practice in first-century Palestine. I will then suggest an alternative approach to the development of ossuary burial.

The earliest scholars to have suggested that ossuary burial was Pharisaic were the first modern editor of the *Tosefta*, Moses Samuel Zuckerman-del, and the profoundly influential Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz.<sup>7</sup> The logic of this position suggests that individual bodily resurrection, which

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*Second Temple Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008); Steven Fine, "Death, Burial and Afterlife," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 440–464. On recent controversies, see Ryan Byrne and Bernadette McNary-Zak, eds., *Resurrecting the Brother of Jesus: The James Ossuary Controversy and the Quest for Religious Relics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> On the Greek loan word *geluskama*, see Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Traditional Press, 1982), 247; E. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries*, 52–55.

<sup>6</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 21–22. Dating proposals are described by Teitelbaum, "The Relationship between Ossuary Burial and the Belief in Resurrection," 4.1.; eadem, "The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon," 52–58.

<sup>7</sup> Moses S. Zuckerman-del, "Lexicalisches und archäologisches im Talmud II, zugleich sechster Artikel zur Halachakritik," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 23 (1874): 184–186; Heinrich Graetz, "Jüdischen Steniskophage im Palästina," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 30 (1881): 529–539.



Figure 10. Tomb of Jason, Jerusalem (photograph by Steven Fine).

appears rather sparingly in Second Temple-period literature, requires that the bones not be intermingled with those of other individuals.

The iconography of extant ossuaries has also been utilized in support of this theory (Figure 11). Images of rosettes, and other rather benign forms borrowed from the repertoire of surface decoration used on wood cabinets as well as mosaics and paintings, were brought as support for belief in resurrection of the dead. Similarly, every image of a tree or other floral element became by the weight of a worn-out and completely unclear scholarly paradigm a “tree of life.”<sup>8</sup> Recently the image of an amphora, photographed sideways, was errantly identified as the redemptive image

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Zofja Ameisenowa, “The Tree of Life in Jewish Iconography,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institutes* 2 (1938–1939): 326–345; Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1953–1968), 1:80, 110, 253, 265; 2:94, 96; 4:75; 7:91–97, 118–121, 125–134; 9:45; 12:136–138.





Figure 11. Ossuary, Jerusalem area, first century (© Trustees of the British Museum).

of Jonah in the mouth of the fish, causing quite a stir even among scholars.<sup>9</sup> The rare discovery of skulls with coins in their mouths in Jerusalem and in Jericho, the deceased apparently prepared to cross the river Styx, cannot be interpreted as a sign of Pharisaic notions of the afterlife, but of Jews participating in the general Greco-Roman anticipation of a life in the hereafter.<sup>10</sup>

The truth is that we simply do not know how widespread beliefs in bodily resurrection were in first-century Jerusalem, nor do we know how accepted Pharisaic norms were. The ossuaries of “Yehoḥana daughter of

<sup>9</sup> See James D. Tabor, “A Preliminary Report of an Exploration of a Sealed 1st Century Tomb in East Talpiot, Jerusalem,” <http://bibleinterp.com/PDFs/Tabor2.pdf> (accessed February 2013); James D. Tabor and Simcha Jacobovici, *The Jesus Discovery: The Resurrection Tomb That Reveals the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012). See the responses to this approach—including my own—and the eventual scholarly consensus, on the blog of the American Schools for Oriental Research beginning February 29, 2012: <http://asorblog.org> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Hachlili and Ann Killebrew, “Was the Coin-on-Eye Custom a Jewish Practice during the Second Temple Period?,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 3 (1983): 147–153; eadem, “Jewish Funerary Customs during the Second Temple Period in Light of the Excavations of the Jericho Necropolis,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 115 (1983): 109–132. Rahmani’s criticisms of Hachlili’s and Killebrew’s conclusions regarding the “coin-on-eye custom” are not convincing. See L. I. Rahmani, “Some Remarks on R. Hachlili’s and A. Killebrew’s ‘Jewish Funerary Customs,’” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 118 (1986): 96–100.

Yehohanan, son of Thophlos, the high priest,<sup>11</sup> and of the family of the high priest Caiaphas, whom Acts 5:15 links to “the party of the Sadducees,”<sup>12</sup> well reflect a situation in which Jews who were not Pharisees used ossuaries for secondary burial. Secondary burial in ossuaries became part of the religious norm of Jerusalem during the century before the Temple’s destruction. There is no reason to suggest, as some have done in order to resuscitate the Pharisee thesis, that non-Pharisees adopted Pharisaic burial customs in a culture in which Pharisaic customs were supposedly the norm.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Joseph Patrich has suggested persuasively that the all-important aqueduct system of first-century Jerusalem was constructed according to Sadducean and not Pharisaic norms.<sup>14</sup> Later rabbinic discussion of ossuary burial does not assume that this mode was particularly Pharisaic or rabbinic, but only that Jews did it and that the practice required discussion and some minor rabbinic regulation. Secondary burial in ossuaries was an element of E. P. Sanders’s “Common Judaism,” that is, the religious *koine* of Second Temple-period Judaea.<sup>15</sup> Eric Meyers anticipated this when he wrote as early as 1969 that “it is an oversimplification to suggest that the custom of Jewish ossuaries reflects only the Pharisaic community of Jerusalem, which adhered to a rather literal conception of resurrection, or that the custom of Hellenistic-Roman bone chambers reflects the Sadducean community, which denied such a belief.”<sup>16</sup>

A corollary to the Pharisee hypothesis is the oft-repeated hypothesis whereby secondary burial is thought to have facilitated a Pharisaic notion of the expiation of sins. That is to say that once the flesh of the deceased has disintegrated, the bones became spiritually pure. There is no literary support for this belief during the Second Temple period, which in any event is virtually silent on this (as on so many other) issues. These scholars

<sup>11</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, no. 881.

<sup>12</sup> Zvi Greenhut, “The Caiaphas Tomb in North Talpote, Jerusalem,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 219–222; Ronny Reich, “Ossuary Inscriptions of the Caiaphas Family from Jerusalem,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 223–225.

<sup>13</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 53–54.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Patrich, “A Sadducean Halakha and the Jerusalem Aqueduct,” *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 25–39; Lee I. Levine, “Archaeology and the Religious Ethos of Pre-70 Palestine,” in *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth and L. L. Johns (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 114.

<sup>15</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), ix.

<sup>16</sup> Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth*, 85.

often cull items from late sources spread throughout rabbinic literature and ingeniously weave them together. A firm supporter of this approach, Pau Figueras, as much as admits the flimsiness of this approach:<sup>17</sup>

It is not explicitly stated that *ossilegium* was considered to be itself a means of atonement of sins. We would rather see it as a religious act by which the deceased could be considered as having attained atonement.

Finally, this approach tacitly assumes ideational continuity between the Pharisees and the later Amoraic sages, assuming the existence of a static attitude toward death and burial in Pharisaic and rabbinic circles without bothering to prove it. This presumption of continuity is always difficult to prove, though in some cases it is quite justified (e.g., tefillin, scroll copying practices, and scriptural reading within synagogues).<sup>18</sup> This is particularly alarming in regard to secondary ossuary burial, which was an innovation that took root extremely quickly and was in decline before finally disappearing by the fourth century.<sup>19</sup> Rachel Hachlili took this approach one step further, adding a nationalist bent. She writes that “with the loss of political freedom and independence [with the beginning of direct Roman rule in 6 CE] the Jews considered themselves to have been sinners. In order to atone for their sins . . . they began the custom of bone collection in order to express their desire to be pure for the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>20</sup> Even if there were any sources to support this interpretation, which there are not, the lavish decoration of many of the tombs, sarcophagi, and ossuaries argues against the kind of ascetic pietism that Hachlili envisions.

The theological interpretation of ossuary burial dominated discussion of this phenomenon, though in a short article in 1937 archaeologist Pesach

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<sup>17</sup> Pau Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 7. Samuel Safrai notes that “There are scattered statements which suggest that the living can atone for the dead, but these beliefs were not widespread, nor did they find any expression in the blessings or early burial practices.” Safrai, “Home and Family,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 784.

<sup>18</sup> Menahem Haran, “Bible Scrolls in Eastern and Western Jewish Communities from Qumran to the High Middle Ages,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 56 (1985): 21–62; Yigael Yadin, *Tefillin from Qumran* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1969); Fine, *This Holy Place*, passim; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1 (71b–72a): ‘Of the Making of Books’: Rabbinic Scribal Arts in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> Rahmani, *Ossuaries*, 21–25; Teitelbaum, “The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon,” 56–58.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Hachlili, “Changes in Burial Practices in the Late Second Temple Period: The Evidence from Jericho” [Hebrew], in *Graves and Burial in Israel in the Ancient Period*, ed. I. Singer (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and The Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 188 (my translation).

Bar Adon provided a more practical explanation. Bar Adon suggests that the enlargement of family tombs to provide a space for each new generation became increasingly more expensive as time went on, and so, at a certain time, Jews began to remove the bones of their relatives from their primary resting places into ossuaries.<sup>21</sup> Nissan Rubin picked up Bar Adon's argument and added another factor. Rubin suggests that ossuary burial began due to increased wealth in first-century Jerusalem. When people had more money, he argues, they abandoned charnel burial—a custom which, we note, had been practiced with only small variation for over a millennium in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup>

Bar Adon and Rubin are completely correct in ascribing economic elements to the development of secondary burial. The extension of family catacombs was extremely expensive, even when land was available. The evidence from Jericho reflects the influence of economics upon Jewish burial. Hachlili reports that in the first generation at Jericho, burial took place in wooden sarcophagi within loculi. When the loculi were full, the bones were removed from these loculi and the space (and in one case, even the casket) reused. The bones would either be placed in ossuaries or, in one case, sealed within a makeshift charnel chamber.<sup>23</sup> The economic impetus still does not completely explain, however, why this transformation took place. Lack of burial space cannot be the sole reason for the development of ossuary burial. One is reminded of the wealth of Byzantine monasteries of the Judean Desert and the charnel rooms that they preserve to this day. Most significantly, cremation boxes (*ostothekai*) used by wealthy Romans bear great resemblance to Jewish ossuaries. Dina Teitelbaum has demonstrated a formal dependence of Jewish ossuaries upon these *ostothekai*, particularly *ostothekai* from nearby Asia Minor.<sup>24</sup> The major difference between *ostothekai* and Judean ossuaries was that Jews used these boxes for secondary burial, and not as receptacles for partially cremated bones. Without opening the boxes and examining the remains, this difference might have been indistinguishable.

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<sup>21</sup> Pesach Bar-Adon, "On the Custom of Secondary Burial" [Hebrew], *Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* 5 (1937): 102–103.

<sup>22</sup> Nissan Rubin, "Secondary Burials in the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods: A Proposed Model of the Relationship of Social Structure to Burial Practice" [Hebrew], *Graves and Burial in Israel in the Ancient Period*, ed. I. Singer (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and The Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 248–269.

<sup>23</sup> Hachlili and Killebrew, "Jewish Funerary Customs," 23–24.

<sup>24</sup> Teitelbaum, "The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon," 227–315.

It is significant that this adaptation took place roughly at the time when Herod the Great began his massive influx of money into Jerusalem for the reconstruction of the city and its Temple. His reconstruction of the Temple, which began ca. 20–19 BCE, coincides with Rahmani's dating of the origins of ossuary burial in Jerusalem between 20 and 15 BCE (others date it more loosely to the last quarter of the first century BCE).<sup>25</sup> From an economic standpoint, this is the factor that facilitated the transformation and the creation of the Jewish ossuary. A related factor, however, was just as important: the rise of a well-trained community of stonemasons, aware of Roman burial practices. The fabrication of Jewish ossuaries was predicated upon this industry, as was the fabrication of stone containers, tables, and the like.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Yitzhak Magen dates the rise of the stone industry to within thirty years of the first ossuaries, about 50 BCE.<sup>27</sup> The relationship between Jewish ossuaries and the general stone carving industry is confirmed by the high level of decoration of many of the extant ossuaries, which parallels in its workmanship other utilitarian objects like tables as well as the geometric plans of mosaic pavements. Mosaics from the northern palace at Masada, with their depictions of the rosette surrounded by frames of geometric design, are an obvious parallel, as are the monumental bas-reliefs from the Temple Mount's southern Hulda Gate (Figure 12) and rosette decoration in the synagogue of Gamla.<sup>28</sup> Particularly significant are images of funerary monuments and of other monumental buildings on the exteriors of ossuaries, which bring important aspects of the new architectural cityscape of late Hasmonean/Herodian Jerusalem into the crypts themselves.<sup>29</sup> One group of ossuaries, for example, reproduces in a schematic fashion the borders that are so typical of Herodian masonry in its depiction of an ashlar wall.<sup>30</sup> Others present images of colonnades

<sup>25</sup> Teitelbaum, "The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon," 52–58, summarizes the various positions.

<sup>26</sup> Compare Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James," 139.

<sup>27</sup> Yitzhak Magen, *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Hizma and the Jerusalem Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society: Israel Antiquities Authority; Staff Officer of Archaeology, Civil Administration for Judea and Samaria, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> On motifs used during the Second Temple period, see Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 1–25.

<sup>29</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 28–34; Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 339–354; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 61–65. See now Lothar Triebel, *Jenseitshoffnung in Wort und Stein: Nefesch und pyramidales Grabmal als Phänomene antiken jüdischen Bestattungswesens im Kontext der Nachbarkulturen* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 35; Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 370–372.





Figure 12. Bas-relief from the Hulda Gate of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem (photograph by Steven Fine).

with columns whose capitals bear close resemblance to Herodian capitals, and of building facades of the sorts that were constructed not only in the necropolis but along the byways of Herodian Jerusalem as well. An ossuary belonging to a worker on the Temple construction project, one Simeon, “builder of the sanctuary,” closes the circle.<sup>31</sup> Ossuary burial was, on a local level, dependent upon the development of the local stone carving industry, which is itself largely a result of the greater wealth of Jerusalem after the rise of the Herod the Great.

On a social level, first-century Judaeen burial presents, as Rubin rightly suggests, a mirror image of familial social relationships among the living.<sup>32</sup> Numerous ossuaries bear the names of the individuals buried within them. While some deceased are referred to in simple familial terms—as *emma*, *abba*, and the like—others bear longer and well-incised epithets.<sup>33</sup> Still others relate the name of the deceased in Hebrew/Aramaic as well as Greek. Family names, like the Goliath family at Jericho, also appear.<sup>34</sup> On one ossuary, the name of the deceased appears no less than five times in two languages, and three is not an uncommon number of inscriptions. Clearly there were Jews in first-century Jerusalem for whom the identity of each individual was important. No less than four inscriptions warn against opening ossuaries, one promising “blindness” to anyone who does so.<sup>35</sup> A small number of ossuary inscriptions reserve the box for one individual exclusively. The small size of this group, just a few in the Israel Government Collection, suggests that this attitude was not widespread.<sup>36</sup> For other Jews, the burial of family members together—mothers and babies, husbands and wives, fathers and sons—was inscribed on the exterior of ossuaries. These inscriptions often reflect family relationships: son of, wife of, mother, father, and the like.<sup>37</sup> Ossuaries that bear such inscriptions are just 25 percent of the 895 ossuaries from the State of Israel collections published by L. I. Rahmani.<sup>38</sup> Teitelbaum shows that the numbers of ossuaries inscribed with all types of markings varied from site to site.

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<sup>31</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, no. 200.

<sup>32</sup> Rubin, “Secondary Burials.”

<sup>33</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 292.

<sup>34</sup> Rachel Hachlili, “The Goliath Family in Jericho: Funerary Inscriptions from a First Century A.D. Jewish Monumental Tomb,” *Bulletin of the American Schools for Oriental Research* 235 (1979): 31–66; Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 235–310.

<sup>35</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, 235–324.

<sup>38</sup> Rahmani, *Catalogue*, *passim*.

Of 123 ossuaries uncovered at Dominus Flevit, 43 of 355 or 12 percent are inscribed; of 40 at Akeldama, 23 or 57 percent are inscribed; and of 22 discovered in the Goliath tomb in Jericho, 14 or 63 percent are inscribed. By contrast, of 35 ossuaries discovered in two excavations on Shmuel Hanavi Street in Jerusalem, only one was inscribed.<sup>39</sup> The inscription of texts upon ossuaries seems to reflect a growing expectation of literacy, principally in Aramaic/Hebrew and in Greek, among Jerusalemites wealthy enough to engage in secondary burial.<sup>40</sup>

Even for those who did not inscribe names on ossuaries, however, the preservation of each skeleton—either by itself (as in 50 percent of cases) or buried with close family members—was preferred over completely anonymous charnel burial. The rise of ossuary burial and the decline of charnel burial seem to be related to developing notions of the individual's place within the family unit. No longer was it wholly acceptable for Uncle Yehuda's femur to intermingle indiscriminately with Aunt Helena's shoulder bone and cousin Yohanan's lower jaw. The individual bodies were kept separate—or at least, more separate than in previous generations. The evidence of ossuary burial reflects a continuum from the bone boxes that were made for one individual and labeled as such, to ossuaries that were made for anonymous multiple interments. All grades between these extremes existed in pre-70 CE Jerusalem. In no cases, however, were specified charnel rooms built, as in the pre-Herodian age, where family members would be routinely and anonymously deposited. This sense of individuation parallels, it is true, the sense of the individual as it was developing within the greater Greco-Roman context. George Foot Moore long ago pointed out that "the Greek religion was individualistic and needed a doctrine of immortality of the soul, in which the individual was rewarded and punished, but the Jewish religion posited a reconstituted nation as the arena of retribution."<sup>41</sup> Overstated as this dichotomy is, the presence of coins within mouths, discussed previously, clearly bespeaks a concern for individual afterlife in the general Greco-Roman sense among at least some first-century Judaeans. Whether this practice was given a Jewish garb by some of the interred, we cannot know from the extant sources. It

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<sup>39</sup> Teitelbaum, "The Relationship between Ossuary Burial and the Belief in Resurrection," 4.3.7, eadem, "The Jewish Ossuary Phenomenon," 43.

<sup>40</sup> Following Meir Bar-Ilan, "Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries C.E.," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, vol. 2, ed. S. Fishbane, S. Schoenfeld, and A. Goldschlaeger (New York: Ktav, 1992), 46–61.

<sup>41</sup> Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 311–312.



is clear from ossuary burial, however, that the notion of the individual as a unique entity within the family was widespread in first-century Jerusalem and its environs.

To conclude, ossuary burial developed among Jews near the time of Herod as a replacement for charnel burial. This transformation was predicated, I believe, upon the wealth of first-century Jerusalem and the construction projects that in many ways were the force behind that wealth. *Osselegium*, a Jewish adaptation of the Roman cremation boxes, provided for more individuated burial within family crypts, and in some cases for well-individuated burial. This individuation follows a general pattern within the Greco-Roman world. Theological motivations or explanations for this practice in first-century Jerusalem certainly must have existed, though the range and content of these are beyond our reach due to the paucity of literary sources. Was this practice associated with the resurrection of the dead? There is no positive evidence to support this contention. In other words, the nineteenth-century scholarly paradigm, maintained until our own time, by which ossuary burial was associated with Pharisaic beliefs in resurrection, must be considered to be mere conjecture. It is not supported by either the literary or by the archaeological data.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### CALIGULA AND THE JEWS: SOME HISTORIOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS OCCASIONED BY GAIUS IN POLYCHROME



Figures 13a–b. Bust of Gaius Caligula, original and reconstructed polychromy (courtesy of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen).

Recent research on polychromy has occasioned a wholesale reevaluation of classical art.<sup>1</sup> No longer the staid white phantoms of our neoclassical turned modernist imaginations, classical art has burst forth from its nineteenth- and twentieth-century frames into the full light of color. In recent years, scholars in Europe and now in the United States have worked actively to colorize the past, analyzing ancient art both through computer scanning and careful art historical connoisseurship.<sup>2</sup> In 2009 I joined a team organized by Bernard Frischer of the University of Virginia and Peter Schertz of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to analyze, reconstruct, and interpret the colors of a rare sculpture of the emperor Gaius, long a part

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based upon a lecture at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, December 4, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Pp. 10, 68–69; 87–100.



Figure 14. Reconstructed polychromy of the Virginia Caligula (courtesy of Bernard Frischer).

of the VMFA collection (Figure 14).<sup>3</sup> Traces of purple were discovered on the rear of the torso, and based upon parallels, reconstructions were suggested. We then turned to the “meaning” of this sculpture, and to consider ways that the now-colored Caligula helps to understand culture in the first century. My task was the Jewish experience. To my surprise, relatively little has been written on the relationship between Caligula and the Jews, and to date no monograph has appeared. This essay is my own first reflection on that relationship, as developed through my experience of Caligula in color.

Few characters in Roman history continue to evoke such strong feelings as the emperor Gaius, known as Caligula—“little boots.” In ancient

<sup>3</sup> 203.0 × 67.3 × 49.5 cm. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 71.20.

times Caligula was treated with fear and loathing by a broad range of authors, in Greek, Latin, and even in Hebrew and Aramaic. In fact, not a single extant ancient author actually has much good to say of Caligula, and even in his lifetime Gaius's sanity was called into question—a theme that has been amplified through the years, right up to Robert Graves's *I, Claudius*<sup>4</sup> and the art pornography of Bob Guccione.<sup>5</sup> Attitudes toward Gaius have served as touchstones for modern identity. One nineteenth-century Prussian author, for example, Ludwig Quidde, was arrested because his biography of Gaius treaded too close to questioning the sanity of the autocratic kaiser Wilhelm II, even as his influential study went into thirty printings.<sup>6</sup> In more recent times, apologists for Gaius have appeared, one author adducing that Caligula was not “insane” as charged, but merely, and understandably in his context, “cruel” (try applying that distinction to Hitler, and explaining that to my mother!).<sup>7</sup>

Historians of the Jewish past have had a particularly complicated relationship with Caligula.<sup>8</sup> The Caligula incident as described by Philo and Josephus<sup>9</sup> bore particular resonance for Western Jews of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this period of halting (often faltering) Emancipation, the status of the Jews of Alexandria under Rome was a point of pride, if not longing. It must be remembered that Jewry received equal rights at differing speeds and levels of intensity in both Europe and the United States, the process continuing well into the second half of the

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Graves, *I, Claudius: From the Autobiography of Tiberius Claudius, Born 10 B.C., Murdered and Deified A.D. 54* (London, A. Barker, 1934), and perhaps more significant, *I, Claudius*, BBC Television production in association with London Film Productions Limited, written by Jack Pulman and directed by Herbert Wise (London: British Broadcasting Company, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> William Hawes, *“Caligula” and the Fight for Artistic Freedom: The Making, Marketing and Impact of the Bob Guccione Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Quidde, *Caligula: Eine Studie über römischen Cäsarenwahnsinn* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1894), English version: *The Kaiser's Double*, trans. C. Field (London: W. Rider & Son, 1915); Karl Holl, Hans Kloft, and Gerd Fesser, eds., *Caligula—Wilhelm II. und der Caesarenwahnsinn: Antikenrezeption und wilhelminische Politik am Beispiel des “Caligula” von Ludwig Quidde* (Bremen: Temmen, 2001); Aloys Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Winterling, *Caligula*. See now Erich Gruen, “Caligula, the Imperial Cult, and Philo's *Legatio*” *Studia Philonica Annual*, 24 (2012): 135–147, who assesses the reliability of Philo's account from a Roman perspective.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, in English, Heinrich Graetz, *The History of the Jews*, trans. B. Löwy (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1893), 2:181–190.

<sup>9</sup> Translations of Philo follow F. H. Colson, *Philo: The Embassy to Gaius*, 10 (London: William Heinemann and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). See also Mary E. Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaïum* (Leiden: Brill, 1961); War 2.184–203, *Ant.* 256–309.

twentieth century. Even when they achieved equal rights before the law, Jews were often restricted from professions, universities, and neighborhoods. As they did with the Spanish Jews of the so-called “Golden Age” that preceded the expulsion of the Jews in 1391<sup>10</sup> and with Italian Jewry of the early modern period,<sup>11</sup> this community projected its hopes for the future into the past, imagining a golden age of Alexandrian Jewry.<sup>12</sup> The life of Jewish communal leader, philosopher, and historian Philo of Alexandria, a “loyal Jew” who wrote in Greek and “hobnobbed” with the Greek-speaking aristocrats of both pagan Alexandria and Jewish Palestine, was a model to be emulated. He was painted by some as the quintessential Reform Jew and by others as the quintessential modern Orthodox Jew—and of course, the Conservative Jews were not far behind. Philo’s success in negotiating his identities was a source of pride, developed by Jews of various proclivities as they set out to form their own modern Jewish identities.<sup>13</sup> Few events haunted this group more than the Alexandrian riots and the Caligula incident, when the carefully built network of relationships and rights constructed by a diaspora community under the Ptolemies and the Romans unraveled, and conflict became inevitable. The events of Caligula’s reign only reminded them of their own modern vulnerability, and reinforced their worst nightmares—which, of course, were far less horrific than what actually happened under the Third Reich. It is not accidental that in the midst of the Nazi onslaught, the great Zionist classicist Hans Yohanan Lewy, having arrived in Jerusalem in 1934, translated and introduced Philo’s *Flaccus* and *Legatio* in the venerable *Schocken Bücherei* in 1935. Published in Berlin, the Schocken Library was an important form of Jewish and liberal cultural resistance to the Nazis. Following on Quidde’s response to Wilhelm II, Lewy implicitly compared German anti-Semites,

<sup>10</sup> Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 71–92; Aaron W. Hughes, “The ‘Golden Age’ of Muslim Spain: Religious Identity and the Invention of a Tradition in Modern Jewish Studies,” *Historicizing “Tradition” in the Study of Religion*, ed. S. Engler and G. P. Grieve (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 51–74.

<sup>11</sup> Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1946). See my discussion of Salo Baron and his school, below, 203–205.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Joseph Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xi, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938); Samuel Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law: The Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940); Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

first among them Hitler himself, to Caligula and the Alexandrian mobs, while evading Nazi censors.<sup>14</sup> Years later, another Berlin-trained Zionist historian, Victor A. Tcherikover, writing from Jerusalem in 1960, analogized the modern and ancient situations, referring to “‘The Jewish Question’ in Alexandria.”<sup>15</sup> These are only two prominent examples.

The writings of Philo—a participant in our story—and of Josephus a generation later, reflect the ambivalence of the Jewish predicament in the Roman Empire. These ancient authors share a kind of liminal, borderline status: Philo the Alexandrian Jewish aristocrat, comfortable with the ways of Rome, the loyal Jew and leader within his own *ethnos*; and Josephus, the elite Jerusalem priest and general in the first Jewish Revolt of 66 CE, who became an apologist both for the Flavian emperors and for Jews and Judaism. Philo and Josephus are almost unique in Classical literature; literate patrician insider-outsiders who negotiated through their writings their complex identities as both colonized “natives” and highly placed “Romans.”<sup>16</sup> Their writings exist specifically because late antique and medieval Christian intellectuals found them of use.<sup>17</sup> Neither was preserved by Jews, who had long since mostly abandoned Greek and, besides, possessed a rich internally focused literature that did not need these patrollers and traversors of the boundaries (though it was this very liminality that appealed to modern Jewish readers).

Philo and Josephus relate the incidents from the perspective of the colonized Jews, telling the “Jewish” story in a way that was intended to curry sympathy from their Roman readers. They tell of events in Egyptian Alexandria and in Jamnia, a Jewish town—Yavneh—in Hebrew, located in the southern coastal plain northeast of Ashdod in southern Judaea. Jamnia had long been a point of conflict between Jews and Greeks,

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<sup>14</sup> Hans Yohanan Lewy, *Von den machterweisen Gottes: Eine zeitgenössische Darstellung der Judenverfolgungen unter dem kaiser Caligula* (Berlin: Schocken, 1935). On this series, see Anthony D. Skinner, “German-Jewish Identity and the ‘Schocken Bücherei,’” *Arche Noah: Die Idee der Kultur im deutsch-jüdischen Diskurs*, ed. B. Greiner and C. Schmidt (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Verlag, 2002), 289–303.

<sup>15</sup> Victor A. Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 2:24.

<sup>16</sup> See the comments of Mary Beard, “The Triumph of Josephus,” *Flavian Culture: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 543–58, esp. 543–546.

<sup>17</sup> On the Christian appropriation of Josephus, see *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 315–427. On the Christian appropriation of Philo, see David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); eadem, *Philo and the Church Fathers: A Collection of Papers* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).



becoming a private imperial estate in the time of Augustus.<sup>18</sup> Our authors relate that Greeks living in close proximity to Jews—in Alexandria and in Jamnia sensing an opening, attempted to gain an advantage over the Jews by setting statues of the by-then divine Gaius (including a bronze sculpture of Gaius driving a *quadriga* [Legation 135]) within the Alexandrian synagogues, and a terracotta altar to Gaius within the public area of Jamnia. Jamnian Jews, whom Philo writes were the majority of the population, perceived this altar as a provocation by what Philo describes apologetically as “new settlers,” “intruders for mischief from the dwellers in adjacent countries.”<sup>19</sup> They destroyed the altar, Philo writes, feeling “it intolerable that the sanctity which truly belongs to the Holy Land should be destroyed.”<sup>20</sup> This event escalated when, taking the side of the Greeks, Gaius ordained that a statue of himself as Jupiter be set up in the Jerusalem temple. Philo narrates at length the terror of the Jews upon hearing of Gaius’s plan. At the conclusion of their plea to the Roman general and governor of Syria, Petronius, not to carry out Caligula’s order, Philo has the Jewish leaders say:<sup>21</sup>

Think you that if (Heaven forbid) any of our people should see the statue being carried in procession to the temple, they would not be transformed to stone, their joints stiffened and their eyes likewise so that they could not even move, and their whole body in each part of its system changed from its natural motions?

Philo presents here a real counterpoint to the statue of Caligula; the (obviously polychrome) Judaeans frozen like statues at the sight of the divine statue. The accounts of Philo and Josephus become all the more striking in light of the polychrome Copenhagen and Richmond sculptures of Caligula, which give us a sense of the material culture that our authors take for granted. Scholars of robotics have suggested that life-like robots that approximate, but do not fully reach full humanity cause revulsion or fear in humans.<sup>22</sup> Polychrome, and thus life-like, sculpture can have

<sup>18</sup> M. Seligsohn, “Jabneh” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Embassy*, 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Embassy*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> *Embassy*, 243.

<sup>22</sup> See Masahiro Mori, “The Uncanny Valley” [Japanese], *Energy* 7, no. 4 (1970): 33–35 (Japanese); translation by K. F. MacDorman and T. Minato, <http://www.movingimages.info/digitalmedia/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/MorUnc.pdf> (accessed January 2013). A more recent study is Jun’ichiro Seyama, “The Uncanny Valley: Effect of Realism on the Impression of Artificial Human Faces,” *Presence* 16, no. 4 (2007): 337–351. My student

similar effect. The assertion of authority, closely associated with fear, was certainly a major purpose served by imperial sculpture. To Jews, these were not mere white ghosts (as they are today), but the statue of Caligula would have represented the bald power of the imperial oppressor; the presence of a usurping “divinity” in a place where only the invisible God of Israel was to hold court.

The fact that the flashpoint of this conflict was a statue of Gaius makes perfect sense in terms of Hellenistic/Roman-Jewish relations in antiquity. From biblical times onward, Israel had distinguished itself in large part by its adherence to one God, and abhorrence of anyone else’s. This was a well-known Jewish eccentricity, having been noted by Greek authors as early as the fourth century BCE (citations preserved, not coincidentally, only by Josephus!).<sup>23</sup> Hellenistic and then Roman conquest of the East occasioned complex accommodations on both sides, particularly in Palestine, as the rather stringent (and often increasingly hostile and besieged) demands of Jewish monotheism interacted with colonialist and often brutal imperial regimes that were sometimes deeply antagonistic, at other times accommodating. Jewish self-presentation even had it that the “Rubicon” moment in the life of Father Abraham was the day he declared that cult statues made by his father Terach were false and broke them up. In the earliest version of this story, told in the *Book of Jubilees*, a sectarian text partially preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Terach admits to the fallacy of his “idols” and leaves with Abram for the promised land.<sup>24</sup> In the next extant version, dating to circa 400 CE, Terach is as evil as the rest of the people in “Ur of the Chaldeans,” and Abram sets out alone.<sup>25</sup> This transformation of Terach in many ways epitomizes Jewish-Gentile relations in the holy land, which went from bad to worse with Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ attempt (with at least some Jewish aristocratic support) to establish his cult in Jerusalem. Among his sins, 1 Maccabees (1:46) recounts that the Seleucid king gave orders “to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals.” Antiochus may not have

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Caleb Fischer brought the “uncanny valley” to my attention, and is currently studying this phenomenon in relation to rabbinic attitudes toward the sculptural environment.

<sup>23</sup> This phenomenon was recently discussed by Daniel Barbu, “The Jewish Sacking of Alien Temples. Limits of Toleration in a Comparative Perspective,” *History of Religions* 50, no. 1 (2010): 21–42.

<sup>24</sup> *Jubilees* 12:1–15, trans. J. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, “The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 9, nos. 3–4 (1959): 149–165, 229–145.

been the only Greek moved to install idolatry in the temple. Mishnah Ta'anit 4:6, a text redacted around 200 CE, vaguely recalls an otherwise unknown episode when a certain Apostomos "burned the Torah and set up a statue (צלם) in the shrine" of the temple in an undisclosed year, on the seventeenth day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, during the summer. This cultural trauma is listed as one of the reasons that an annual fast (still observed today) was established on that date.<sup>26</sup>

With the rather unexpected victory of the Hasmoneans against the Seleucids, during the next century the new Jewish kingdom created, according to the books of Maccabees, what I have called a kind of "idolatry-free zone" in an enlarged Judaea. Within their expanding domain, the Hasmoneans consciously destroyed "pagan" sites, and also the great temple complex of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim near modern Nablus. These conquests included an attack on Jamnia by Judah Maccabee and the burning of its port and its ships.<sup>27</sup> Infringement on this "idolatry-free zone"—as later on in Jamnia under Caligula—was treated by Jews as a grave infraction and a profanation of their "holy land."<sup>28</sup> Truth be told, pronouncements of the Julio-Claudian emperors (though often, not the actions of their functionaries) were usually quite accommodating—or at least laissez-faire, regarding what was perceived as a strange "Jewish superstition." The emperors were cognizant of the central location of Judaea as the land bridge between Egypt and Syria and of the size and interconnectedness of the Jewish diaspora, both in the Empire and, significantly, in the enemy Parthian Empire (a place that was far more friendly toward Jews and Judaism than the Greco-Roman world ever was). Controlling the Jews by keeping them "on their side"—while *de facto* keeping this particularly complex ethnic group off balance—was thus a useful imperial strategy, even if this larger end was not always a conscious goal. As Philo and Josephus tell it, Caligula upset the balance at the imperial level, a situation recognized by both Jewish leaders and Petronius sent with overwhelming force to enforce Gaius's edict to place his image in the Jerusalem temple (at first, a marble colossus carved in nearby Sidon, then perhaps a large cast bronze). If anything, Philo's *Legation to Gaius*—and Josephus's subsequent writings—are attempts in literary terms to restore

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Sperber, "Apostomos," in *Encyclopædia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 2:217–218. Louis Ginsberg, "Apostomus," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902), 2:21–2, identifies Apostomos as Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Macc. 12:8–9, 40. See also 1 Macc. 5:58–60.

<sup>28</sup> *Embassy*, 202.

the balance, to portray Caligula's actions as an infraction of Roman imperial norms (thus Philo's claim of "madness," and Josephus's restraint in not repeating this claim—which might discomfort his Flavian patrons) and to depict the Jews as having maintained their side of a social contract that was enshrined in Roman law, custom, and habits.<sup>29</sup>

Jewish-Roman negotiations surrounding the imperial cult are a good example of the ways that this *modus vivendi* had developed before Caligula. It was natural in the Roman world, and particularly in the eastern empire, to venerate and sacrifice before the image of the emperor. Jews, of course, would have none of this, and the Ptolemies, followed by Augustus, accepted an accommodation whereby the Jews would pray "for" the ruler in the synagogues, and sacrifice *on behalf of* the emperor in the Jerusalem temple. Numerous inscriptions from the Ptolemaic period that reflect this practice are extant, for example, "On behalf of King Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews (dedicate) the synagogue."<sup>30</sup> In return for such public statements of loyalty, synagogues were protected. In another inscription we read: "On the orders of the queen and king, in place of the previous plaque about the dedication of the synagogue let what is written below be written up. King Ptolemy Euergetes (proclaimed) the synagogue inviolate. The queen and king gave the order."<sup>31</sup>

Veneration of the ruler, transformed after the death of Julius Caesar into the cult of the emperor, was thus translated into a set of behaviors that were workable for both sides, and the Roman Peace was maintained. In a similar way, Herod the Great, the Roman "King of Judaea" imposed by Augustus, rebuilt the Jerusalem temple as a distinctly Roman building, reminiscent of a temple of the imperial cult. Philo even relates that Augustus had "adorned our temple through the costliness of his dedications, and ordered that for all time continuous sacrifices of whole burnt offerings should be carried out every day at his own expense as a tribute to the most high God" (*Legation* 157). The main difference between Herod's Temple and a standard (though particularly fine) Roman imperial temple (like, for example, the smaller imperial temples Herod built just outside

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<sup>29</sup> See Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), who focuses upon this so-called (an) iconic rhetoric within Josephus, with some reference to Philo.

<sup>30</sup> *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, ed. W. Horbury and David Noy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), no. 22, pp. 35–37.

<sup>31</sup> *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, no. 125, pp. 212–214.

Jewish territory in Samaria and Caesarea Maritima and at Omrit in the north of Israel) was that there was no actual statue of a deified emperor in the Temple—though a compromise was apparently effected, whereby a large imperial eagle did decorate the Temple, much to the dislike of at least some of the Jewish population.<sup>32</sup>

This carefully constructed *modus vivendi* did witness infractions, followed by Jewish and Roman attempts to gird its norms. When Herod was thought to be dead in 5 BCE (a year before he actually died), for example, young students set out on a seemingly minor “intifada” and tore down the eagle, causing an internal crisis in which they and their teachers were publically executed, while the reigning high priest was replaced.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, when the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (ruled 26–36 CE)—famous from the trial and execution of Jesus for the treasonous claim of being “king of the Jews”—attempted to set golden plaques that Jews thought might hide a kind of covert idolatry on the walls of Herod’s palace, and on another occasion when he ordered Roman soldiers to march through Judaea with their standards raised in the air (again, usual Roman practice), large numbers of Jews set out to thwart him, and he was punished by Tiberius.<sup>34</sup> This, at least, is what Philo and then Josephus, actors in this historical drama and not disconnected recorders of the Jewish past, tell us. What we know for sure is that the Jewish polity hated the presence of Roman “idolatry,” a stipulation to the relationship that the Empire mostly respected.

The case of Caligula is remembered in the Jewish sources of subsequent centuries in a very spotty manner, mainly, I think, because it was overshadowed by the immensity of Titus’s destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, and the eventual transformation of the Temple Mount into a temple to Jupiter of the Capitoline in Hadrian’s rebuilt city, from the 130s CE known as Aelia Capitolina.<sup>35</sup> Even for Josephus, this event is a way station

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<sup>32</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 73–75. See Peter Schertz and Steven Fine, “Herod’s Temple: An Ornament to the Empire,” *Cambridge History of World Religious Architecture*, gen. ed. Richard Etlin (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See the insightful analysis of Albert Baumgarten, “Herod’s Eagle,” in *‘Go Out and Study the Land’ (Judges 18:2): Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel*, ed. A. M. Maeir, J. Magness, and L. H. Schiffman (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 7–21.

<sup>34</sup> *Embassy*, 299–305; *War* 2.169–174, *Ant.* 18.55–59. Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 75. See von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome*, 107–113, 165–166.

<sup>35</sup> See Yaron Z. Eliav, *God’s Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place, and Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 83–124, and the bibliography cited there.

on the long road leading to the destruction of Jerusalem; a near catastrophe, but one averted nonetheless. In its own day, though, the death of Gaius is described by Philo as a manifestation of God's will—even if Philo expressed it more with a sigh of relief than with exuberance in the face of what in the end was a net Jewish success. A Hebrew text of the first century that regulates fasting and expressions of happiness makes special mention of this event. According to Megillat Ta'anit, the "Scroll of Fasts," "On the 22nd thereof [Shevat, roughly January] the deed of the hated one when he commanded to bring it into the *naos* was cancelled; [One is] not allowed to mourn."<sup>36</sup> Practicing a form of *damnatio memoriae* that Roman senators might well have appreciated, this text avoids mention of Gaius's name. A somewhat later text is more explicit: "Simon the Righteous heard from within the Holy of Holies [of the Jerusalem temple]: 'The deed of the hated one when he commanded to bring it into the *naos* was cancelled.' Caligula has been killed, and his decrees cancelled. He [Simon] heard this [Divine decree] in the Aramaic language."<sup>37</sup> All of this is to say that 22 Shevat 41 CE (not long after Caligula's death on January 24, 41 CE) was a day of quiet celebration for first-century Jews, living under an empire where the maintenance of happy days required some effort!

The beautiful statue of Gaius that stands at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is one of only two that survived a very thorough—if unofficial—Roman *damnatio*. This sculpture provides a valuable window into what ancient Jews "saw" in the synagogues of Alexandria, what they feared Caligula would place in the Temple, and what was, visually, at stake. This is all the more so in his colorized near-human state. On a larger level, it allows for reflection on the crisis caused under Gaius, when the delicate fabric of relationships between the colonized Jews and the imperial Romans broke down on the point that neither Caligula's temperament (whether "evil" or *merely* "mad") nor Jewish tradition (to the imperial Romans, a "superstition," if a venerable one) provided much wiggle room. The ancient Jewish historians and rabbis who wrote of this event, and the modern Jewish historians who chronicled it, had much to lose from the Caligula affair in terms of the place of the Jewish *ethnos* within both larger Roman and modern European society. In modern Israel, a nation formed in the shadows of the nineteenth and twentieth century's worst tyrants,

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<sup>36</sup> *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History* [Hebrew], ed. V. Noam (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Institute, 2003), 283–290.

<sup>37</sup> t. Sotah 13:7.





Figure 15. Caligula Shoes, Jerusalem (photograph by Steven Fine).

on two continents, Caligula is still a potent enough cultural force that he is neutralized—apparently with a chuckle—in a national women’s shoe chain named for “little boots” himself (Figure 15).<sup>38</sup>

For classicists, Caligula continues to be a touchstone, a place to reflect upon the Roman heritage, and for some, a site to play out a subversive streak against their own Christian culture. When I first saw the Copenhagen Caligula, recolorized in all his glory in an exhibition at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles, I must admit that I gasped.<sup>39</sup> My next thought: “Now I get what they were so upset about!” I hope this short excursus illustrates how one “subaltern,” and very literate, colonized people in the Roman world may have responded when they strolled through the forum of Alexandria or perhaps Rome and “saw” the visage of “Caligula in 3-D”—and the continuing significance of that encounter.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.caligula.co.il/> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>39</sup> R. Panzanelli, ed., *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Getty Research Institute, 2008), 110–115.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### “WHEN I WENT TO ROME . . . THERE I SAW THE MENORAH”: THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE IMPLEMENTS IN RABBINIC MEMORY, HISTORY, AND MYTH



Figure 16. 3-D scan of the spolia from the Jerusalem Temple, Arch of Titus, Rome (scan by Unocad, courtesy of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies).

From the earliest literary depictions of the Tabernacle and its implements in the Pentateuch to most recent times, concern for the Temple implements has held a central place in Jewish imagination.<sup>1</sup> This is true of the implements described in Exodus 25, and to a lesser extent of the implements of the Second Temple. A poignantly contemporary example of this concern was reported on the front page of the *Jerusalem Post* on January 18, 1996. The newspaper reports a personal meeting between Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> See Carol Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003); Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form and Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), and the short essays collected in *By the Light of the Menorah*, ed. Y. Israeli (Jerusalem: Israel Museum; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2000).

Minister of Religious Affairs Shimon Shetreet and Pope John Paul II. After the meeting, Shetreet reported that

he had asked for Vatican cooperation in locating the 60-kg gold menorah from the Second Temple that was brought to Rome by Titus in 70 CE. Shetreet claimed that recent research at the University of Florence indicated the menorah might be among the hidden treasures in the Vatican's catacombs.<sup>2</sup> "I don't say it's there for sure," he said, "but I asked the Pope to help in the search as a goodwill gesture in recognition of the improved relations between Catholics and Jews."<sup>3</sup>

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* discussed the responses to the incident in an article in May 1996. Witnesses to this conversation, reports *Haaretz*, "tell that a tense silence hovered over the room after Shetreet's request was heard."<sup>4</sup> Shetreet's request is a fascinating extension of the Zionist hope that the menorah taken by Titus be returned "home" by the Zionist movement.<sup>5</sup> This is expressed in literary and visual sources, most officially on the 1955 Israel Independence Day commemorative postage stamp showing the Arch of Titus menorah ablaze within the seal of the State of Israel (Figure 17).<sup>6</sup>

The legends of the menorah at the Vatican have had considerable currency among American Jews, and now among Israelis as well. I have heard numerous versions from Jews who are members of all synagogue movements, many of whom take it to be a historical fact. According to the one, a certain American Orthodox rabbi entered the Vatican and saw the menorah. According to another account, told to me by an Israeli Moroccan rabbi resident in the United States, it was a Moroccan rabbi known as "Rabbi Pinto." An American-Sephardi-Israeli was adamant that the great early modern rabbi and traveler, Hayim David Joseph Azulai (d. 1806), known as the *Hidiah*, saw it (he did not). An American resident in Jerusalem recently told me a version that bears a distinctly Anglo-Israeli flavor. According to this embellishment, the pope showed Rabbi Herzog the

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<sup>2</sup> No one at the University of Florence with whom I have been in contact has knowledge of this research.

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Palmieri-Billig, "Shetreet: Pope Likely To Visit Next Year," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 18, 1996, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ronan Bergman, "The Pope's Jewish Treasures" [Hebrew], *Mussaf Haaretz*, May 15, 1996, 18–20, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Alec Mishory, *Lo and Behold: Zionist Icons and Visual Symbols in Israeli Culture* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), 165–199.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See Gershon Litzman, *Gershon's 1978 Specialized Catalogue of Israel and the Holy Land* (New York: Gershon Litzman, 1978), 76.



Figure 17. Postage stamp showing the menorah on the seal of the State of Israel ablaze, Israel Independence Day, 1955.

golden menorah during a visit to the Vatican. Pius XII refused to return it! There is a kernel of historicity buried deep in this anecdote. Rabbi Herzog met with Pope Pius XII on March 10, 1946, at the Vatican in his effort to reclaim Jewish orphans in Europe.<sup>7</sup> He also had a particular interest in the Arch of Titus menorah—particularly in the shape of its base.<sup>8</sup> This urban myth picks up where these historical facts end. Father Leonard Boyle, former director of the Vatican Libraries, told of Orthodox Jewish tourists from the United States entering the library during their touristic visits to the Vatican, and with all naiveté telling Father Boyle that their teachers had instructed them to go find the menorah during their visits to the Vatican!<sup>9</sup> In this way, the most holy pilgrimage complex in Western Christendom is turned into a Jewish pilgrimage site—or at least

<sup>7</sup> Michael R. Marrus, "The Vatican and the Custody of Jewish Child Survivors after the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 3 (2007): 390–394.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Herzog, "The Shape of the Menorah in the Arch of Titus" [Hebrew], in *Scritti in memoria di Sally Mayer* (Jerusalem: Mosad Shelomoh Meir; Milan: Makhon le-Madaei ha-Yahadut, 1956), 95–98. For a use of the menorah myth in the search for the Holy Grail, see Harry Freedman, *The Gospels' Veiled Agenda: Revolution, Priesthood and the Holy Grail* (Ropley, Hants, UK: O Books, 2009), 162–163.

<sup>9</sup> Bergman, "The Pope's Jewish Treasures."

a religiously amenable option for Jews uncomfortable with visiting Christian sites.<sup>10</sup>

On a recent visit to the ancient synagogue at Capernaum,<sup>11</sup> overseen by the Franciscans, I overheard an Israeli tour guide matter-of-factly explaining the image of a menorah in the late antique synagogue friezes to Christian tourists/pilgrims: “The seven-branched menorah of the Temple is now, as everyone knows, stored in the basement of the Vatican.” Closer to historical reality, classicist Mary Beard writes, seemingly with tongue in cheek, that “the treasures of the Jewish Temple more probably lie at the bottom of the Mediterranean,”<sup>12</sup> or as I have suggested, were melted down long ago.

As I began this search during the 1990s, the founding father of Jewish folklore studies Dov Noy assured me that the myth of the menorah at the Vatican is not a part of traditional Jewish folklore during the modern period, and that this myth was not recorded by the researchers of the Israel Folklore Archive. Neither have I found reference to it in any report or discussion by travelers to Rome in the pre–World War II era.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, no reference to this myth appears in the broad selection of historical Jewish newspapers available via the Tel Aviv University / National Library of Israel database, even though the Arch of Titus and particularly the menorah were often discussed.<sup>14</sup> This myth did not appear in scholarly literature of the 1950s or 60s, where other myths of the menorah

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<sup>10</sup> A typical example of Jewish renarrativizing of Christian pilgrimage occurred on an eleven-day kosher tour of Italy that I co-led in 2001. Members of the group avidly discussed the permissibility of entering the Vatican and other Christian sites, as well as their personal comfort level in doing so. A minority chose not to enter, while most did (including the late Chana Weinberg, of Ner Israel Rabbinical Seminary in Baltimore). The Israeli guide and I narrated the visits to Christian sites in such a way as to highlight Jewish points of contact, providing a Jewish script for a distinctly Christian pilgrimage experience. At the Arch of Titus this guide orchestrated a distinctly Jewish ritual event, singing with the group Psalm 126 to the tune of *Hatikvah* the Israeli anthem. (Note that this psalm is recited before festive meals on Sabbaths and festivals. The tune of *Hatikvah* is used with Psalm 126 in nationalistic Jewish religious contexts in Israel and abroad, particularly on Israel Independence Day.)

<sup>11</sup> Summer 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 153.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Solomon Schechter, “The Earliest Jewish Community in Europe,” in *Studies in Judaism, First Series* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), 326–340; Marvin Lowenthal, *A World Passed By: Scenes and Memories of Jewish Life in Europe and North Africa* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), 238.

<sup>14</sup> Historical Jewish Press, National Library of Israel, <http://www.jpress.org.il/view-english.asp>.



Figure 18. Spolia from the Jerusalem Temple, Arch of Titus, Rome (photograph by Unocad, courtesy of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies).

are discussed,<sup>15</sup> nor in popular literature before the recent spate of writings—even when it might have enhanced the story!<sup>16</sup> My sense is that the menorah at the Vatican is a distinctly American-Jewish urban myth of the second half of the last century, blending American anti-papism with traditional Jewish fear and distrust of Christians, particularly Catholics. It developed and is maintained, I imagine, as a less-than-trusting response to increased openness toward Jews on the part of the Vatican—particularly since the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II's establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel—and to the starts and stops in the relationship since. The myth even made the *New York Times* bestseller list, with Daniel Levin's *Da Vinci Code*-esque thriller *The Last Ember* (2009).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hans Yohanan Lewy, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), 255–258; Heinrich Strauss, "The History and Form of the Seven-Branded Candlestick of the Hasmonean Kings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22 (1959): 6–16; eadem, "The Date and Form of the Menorah of the Maccabees" [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 6 (1960): 122–129; Daniel Sperber, "The History of the Menorah," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16, nos. 3–4 (1965): 135–159.

<sup>16</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Der begambene Leuchter* (Vienna: H. Reichner, 1937), translated as *The Buried Candelabrum*, trans. E. and C. Paul (New York: Viking Press, 1937).

<sup>17</sup> Eg. Daniel Levin, *The Last Ember* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009). See <http://daniellevin.com/> (accessed May 2012).



I have related here examples of this fascinating popular tradition that I have encountered, which awaits a thorough treatment.<sup>18</sup>

The public fascination and political prominence of the myth of the Vatican menorah during the last twenty years or so inspired no less than five scholarly studies by Anglophone scholars between 2005 and 2008, plus my own cover article in the generalist *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 2005. Classicists David Noy, Fergus Millar, and Mary Beard have dealt mainly with classical sources, I have focused mainly upon the rabbinic sources and archaeological parallels, and Ra'anana S. Boustan has attempted to encompass the literary sources from Roman times through the Islamic conquest. In addition, Alexei M. Sivertsev has thoroughly contextualized Byzantine-period texts within their Byzantine context.<sup>19</sup> In this essay I present my somewhat updated contextualization of the classical rabbinic sources, with some reference to later Byzantine and medieval materials. This research has become much more significant than I had originally imagined, as it has led me to primary research on the Arch of Titus menorah,

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<sup>18</sup> I intend to return to this subject in my *The Menorah: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> David Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome: A Jewish Pilgrimage in Reverse?," in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. J. Elsner and I. Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373–385; Fergus Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, ed. J. Edmondson, S. Mason, and J. B. Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101–128; S. Fine, "The Temple Menorah: Where is It?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 31, no. 4 (2005): 18–25, 62–63; eadem, "When I went to Rome, there I Saw the Menorah...": The Jerusalem Temple Implements between 70 CE and the Fall of Rome," in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the "Other" in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough (Boston: American Schools Of Oriental Research, 2007), 1:169–180; Mary Beard, "The Triumph of Josephus"; eadem, *The Roman Triumph*, esp. 151–153. See also the following derivative studies: Sean Kingsley, *God's Gold: A Quest for the Lost Temple Treasures of Jerusalem* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Meir Soloveitchik, "Mysteries of the Menorah," *Commentary*, March, 2008, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/mysteries-of-the-menorah/>. For Byzantine Christian traditions relating to the disposition of the menorah after the destruction of Rome, see Lewy, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism*; Strauss, "The History and Form of the Seven-Branched Candlestick of the Hasmonean Kings"; eadem, "The Date and Form of the Menorah of the Maccabees"; Sperber, "The History of the Menorah," 154–155; Martin Harrison, "From Jerusalem and Back Again: The Fate of the Treasures of Solomon," in *Churches Built In Ancient Times: Recent Studies In Early Christian Archaeology*, ed. K. Painter (London: Society of Antiquaries of London: Accordia Research Centre, University of London), 239–248; Ra'anana S. Boustan, "The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople: Jewish Counter-geography in a Christianizing Empire," in *Antiquity after Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. G. Gardner and K. L. Osterloh (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 327–372; and Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 125–138.



Figure 19. The Arch of Titus, Rome (photograph by Unocad, courtesy of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies).

under the rubric of the Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project (Figures 16, 18 and 19). This project is intended to take the discussion to the next step, by discovering and then reconstructing the original polychromy of the bas-reliefs and especially of the menorah panel. In our preliminary study in July 2012, our team discovered the original ochre pigment of Titus’s menorah—a harbinger of new discoveries in the next phase of the project.<sup>20</sup>

The ancient rabbis were vitally interested in the whereabouts of the Tabernacle/Temple vessels. Among the most fascinating evidence for this rabbinic concern is a group of sources that suggest that the sages actually visited Rome and there “saw” the menorah and other vessels of the Second Temple. The earliest appears in Tannaitic sources, and the latest in

<sup>20</sup> See Fine, “Menorahs in Color: On the Study of Polychromy in Jewish Visual Culture of Roman Antiquity”; Piening, “Examination Report: The Polychromy of the Arch of Titus Menorah Relief.”



Byzantine/early Islamic-period midrashim.<sup>21</sup> My purpose here is to assess the historical significance of these sources first against the background of rabbinic literature, and what we know about the whereabouts of these vessels, especially the menorah, during the latter first and second century CE. All too often rabbinic sources are discarded by contemporary scholars who focus upon their alleged lack of temporal referents, with the claim that this literature is far less trustworthy than contemporaneous literature.<sup>22</sup> This assertion is overstated. Parallel sources for this inquiry, from Josephus and the archaeology of Rome and Palestine, allow for the contextualization of these traditions—something of a rarity for rabbinic evidentiary traditions. The sources are as follows:

### 1. Tosefta Kippurim 2:16—The Temple Veil

נטל את הדם ממי שממרים בו  
 נכנס למקום שנכנס ועמד במקום שעמד והזה ממנו על הפרוכת כנגד שני בדי  
 ארון  
 אחת למעלה ושבע למטה ולא היה מתכוין להזות לא למעלה ולא למטה אלא  
 כמצליף  
 וכך היה מונה אחת אחת אחת ושתיים אחת ושלוש אחת וארבע אחת  
 וחמש אחת ושש אחת ושבע  
 ר' יהודה אמ' משם ר' ליעזר: כך היה מונה אחת אחת אחת ושתיים ואחת  
 שלוש ואחת ארבע ואחת חמש ואחת שש ואחת שבע ואחת  
 היה מהלך לשמאלו עם הפרוכת  
 ולא היה מגיע לפרוכת  
 אם הגיע הגיע  
 אמ' ר' לעזר בי ר' יוסה: אני ראיתי ברומי היו עליה טיפי דמים ואמ' לי אילו  
 מדמים של יום הכפורים.

He took the blood from the one who was stirring it.  
 He entered the place into which he had entered [earlier] and stood in the place where he had stood, and sprinkled some of it on the Mercy Seat (*kapporet*)<sup>23</sup> toward the two cloths of the ark, one [sprinkle] upwards and seven downwards. But he did not intentionally sprinkle upwards or downwards. But he did it like one who swings a whip. And thus did he count: "One, one and one, one and two, one and three, one and four, one and five, one and six, one and seven."

<sup>21</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. M. Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1991), 119–244, 254–393.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Hagith Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 362–364, and my review of this volume, *Review of Biblical Literature* 10 (2009), [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7178\\_7804.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7178_7804.pdf) (accessed August 2012).

<sup>23</sup> See Lieberman's comment, ad loc.

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rabbi Lazer: "Thus did he count: 'One and one and one, two and one, three and one, four and one, five and one, six and one, seven and one.'"

He went to his left, along the veil.

And he did not touch the veil.

But if he touched it, he touched it.

*Said Rabbi Lazer son of Rabbi Jose, "I saw it in Rome and there were drops of blood on it.*

*"And they told me:<sup>24</sup> 'These are from the drops of blood of the Day of Atonement.'<sup>25</sup>*

## 2. Sifre Zuta, *Be-ha'alotkha* to Numbers 8:2—The Menorah

ומניין שיהיו כל הנרות מוסטרין כנגד נר האמצעי?

ת"ל אל מול פני המנורה

וכה"א והוא יושב ממולי

אמר ר' שמעון: כשהלכתי לרומי וראיתי שם את המנורה היו כל הנרות מוסטרין כנגד נר האמצעי.

And whence do I know that each lamp was pointed toward the middle lamp? Scripture says: "toward the lampstand" (Num 8:2).

And thus it says: "and he dwells turned toward me" (Num 22:5).

Said Rabbi Simeon: When I went to Rome there I saw the menorah. All of the lamps were pointed toward the middle lamp.<sup>26</sup>

## 3. Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 4:1, 41c—The Priestly Head Plate

ציץ היה כתוב עליו קודש ליי'

קודש מלמטן ושם מלמעלן

כמלך שהוא יושב על קתדרין שלו

ודכוותה אחד מלמטן ושם מלמעלן

אמר רבי אלעזר בי רבי יוסי אני ראיתיו ברומי ולא היה כתוב עליו אלא שיטה

אחת קודש ליי'

The priestly head plate, on it was written: "Holy to the Lord."

"Holy" was written below, and "to the Lord" was written above.

This is like a king who sits on his throne.

And similarly [for lots for the scapegoat].

Said Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose: I saw it in Rome, and the name was written on it in a single line, "Holy to the Lord."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See *Midrash Tanhuma*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1913), *Va-yakel* 10; Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-fshutah*, ad loc.

<sup>25</sup> *The Tosefta*, ed. S. Lieberman, 2nd ed. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992); eadem, *Tosefta ki-fshutah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–1988), ad loc., for parallels.

<sup>26</sup> *Sifre D'Be Rab and Sifre Zuta on Numbers*, ed. H. S. Horowitz (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1966) = *Midrash ha-gadol*, ed. Z. M. Rabinowitz (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1967), ad loc.

<sup>27</sup> See b. Sukkah 5a.

#### 4. Genesis Rabba 10, 7 (Venice, 1545)—The Mosquito That Ate Titus's Brain

טיטוס הרשע נכנס לבית קדשי הקדשים וחרבו שלופה בידו וגידר את שתי הפרוכת, ונטל שתי זונות ובעלן על גבי המזבח, ויצא חרבו מלאה דם, אית דאמרי מדם הקדשים, ואית דאמרי מדם שעיר של יום הכפורים וחירף וגידף ונטל כל כלי בית המקדש ועשאן כמין גורגותני אחת והתחיל מחרף ומגדף כלפי מעלה ואמר לא דמי ההוא דעביד קרבא עם מלכא במדברא ונצח ליה, לההוא דעביד קרבא עם מלכא בגו פלטיין ידיה ונצח ליה, ירד לספינה כיון שירד מחאיה נחשלא בימא, אמר דומה זה שאין כחו של אלוה של אומה זו אלא במים, דור אנוש לא פרע מהן אלא במים, דור המבול לא פרע מהן אלא במים, פרעה וכל חילו לא פרע מהן אלא במים, אף אני כשהייתי בתוך ביתו וברשותו לא היה יכול לעמוד בי ועכשיו לכאן קדמני, סבור הוא שיהרגני במים, א"ל הקב"ה רשע חייך מבריה שהיא פחותה מכל הבריות שבראתי מששת ימי בראשית בה אני נפרע מאותו רשע, מיד רמז הקב"ה לשר של ים ועמד מזעפו, כיון שהגיע לרומי יצאו כל גדולי רומי לקראתו וקילסו אותו, כיון שעלה לרומי נכנס למרחץ, כיון שיצא הביאו פיילי פוטרין של יין לשתותו ונכנס יתוש בתוך חוטמו והיה נוקר את מוחו והולך עד שנעשה גדול כמו גזול של שתי ליטראות, והיה מצוה ואומר פצעו מוחו של אותו האיש ודעו במה אלהיהם של יהודים נפרע מאותו האיש, מיד קראו לרופאים ופצעו מוחו, והוציאו כגזול של שתי ליטראות, אר"א בר רבי יוסי אנא חמיתיה ברומי תרתין ליטרין מהכא וגזולא מהכא ותקל חד לקביל חד, ונטלו אותו ונתנו אותו בתוך קערה אחת, כל מה דהוה הדין שני הוה הדין שני, פרח יתושה, פרחא נפשיה דטיטוס הרשע.

The wicked Titus entered the Holy of Holies, his sword drawn in his hand, slashed the two veils. He brought two harlots and performed sex on them on the altar, and his sword came out full of blood.

There are those who say that it was from the blood of the sacrifices, and there are others who say that it was from the blood of the he-goat of Yom Kippur.

He cursed and blasphemed and took all the Temple vessels and made them like a single net and began to curse and blaspheme Heaven, saying: "One who makes war with a king in the desert and vanquishes him cannot be compared with one who makes war against a king in his own palace and vanquishes him."

He then embarked on a ship. As soon as he had embarked a storm smote the sea.

Said he: "It appears that the power of the God of this nation is only on the sea. He punished the Generation of Enosh by water. He only exacted retribution from the generation of Enosh through water. He only exacted retribution from the generation of the Flood through water. He exacted retribution from Pharoah and his army through water. When I was in His house and His own domain He could not stand against me, but now I am beginning to think that he will kill me with water."

The Holy One, blessed be He said to him: "Villain! By your life, I will inflict punishment upon this villain using the most insignificant creature that I created during the six days of creation."

Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, beckoned to his guardian angel of the sea and he ceased from his fury.

When he reached Rome all the dignitaries of Rome came out and lauded him.

When he arrived in Rome he entered to the bath house, and when he left they brought him a vile of spiced wine to drink.

A mosquito entered his nose and gnawed his brain until it became as big as a two-pound dove. He screamed, saying: "Let them (the doctors) split open the brain of that man (that is, his own brain)."

Immediately the doctors were called.

They split his brain and removed it, being the size of a two-pound dove.

*Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose said: I saw it in Rome. There were two pounds on one side [of the scale] and the dove on the other, and the one weighed exactly the same as the other.*

They took it [the pigeon] and placed it in one bowl. As the bird changed so did he [Titus] change, and when the mosquito fled, the soul of the wicked Titus fled.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Esther Rabba 1, 12—The Throne of Solomon

...תאנא אסא וכל מלכי יהודה ישבו עליו  
וכיון שעלה נבוכדנצר והחריב את ירושלים הגלה אותו לבבל  
ומבבל למדי וממדי ליון ומיון לאדום.  
א"ר אלעזר בר' יוסי: אני ראיתי שבריו ברומי.

...It has been taught: Asa and all the kings of Judah sat upon it, and when Nebuchadnezzar came up and sacked Jerusalem he carried it off to Babylon.

From Babylon it was taken to Media and from Media to Greece and from Greece to Edom [that is, Rome].

*Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose said: I saw its fragments in Rome.*<sup>29</sup>

Our sources in Tosefta Sukkah, Sifre Zuta, and Yerushalmi Yoma have a reasonable chance at historicity, while the Genesis Rabba and Esther Rabba sources are wholly literary. In Genesis Rabba this literary convention is used to add veracity to the physical evidence of Titus's punishment. Esther Rabba reworks the "I saw" type in response to the travels of Solomon's throne. After passing through Babylonia, Media, and Greece, the throne arrives in Rome by force of Daniel's vision of the four kingdoms. Another Byzantine-period collection, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, is aware of

<sup>28</sup> See the manuscript traditions and parallels cited in *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965), 1:82-84.

<sup>29</sup> Vilna edition.

both Tabernacle artifacts that were “hidden away” and Second Temple artifacts taken to Rome. The objects taken to Rome include “the mortar of the house of Avtimas, the table, the menorah, the veil of the ark, and the vestments of the anointed priest.” This tradition assembles the artifacts that sources suggest sages “saw” in Rome, adding to these “the mortar of the house of Avtimas.”<sup>30</sup> Raanan S. Boustan associates the Byzantine-period sources with Christian interest in the sacred vessels. Sivsertsev goes much farther, reading this interest as reflective of deep inculturation of Byzantine notions of empire among Jewish authors as they imagined a messianic return of the Temple artifacts from Rome.<sup>31</sup>

The traditions preserved in Tosefta Yoma, Sifre Zuta, and Yerushalmi Kippurim are of another order. Each of the items described in these traditions—the *parokhet*, the menorah, and perhaps the priestly head plate—could well have been viewed in Rome in the second century by the mid-century rabbis mentioned: Rabbi Simeon son of Yoḥai and the son of his Ushan compatriot, Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose.<sup>32</sup> In the sources under discussion direct evidence of having “seen” these Temple vessels and other “historical” artifacts is taken at face value. It is privileged testimony that serves to conclude theoretical discussions of the vessels within their various pericopes.<sup>33</sup>

Our evidence for the disposition of the Temple vessels after the destruction of the Temple comes from two complementary sources: Flavius Josephus’s *The Jewish War*, completed circa 75 CE, and the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum, completed circa 90 CE. Josephus reports that the table for

<sup>30</sup> Ed. S. Schechter (New York: Feldheim, 1967), version A, chap. 41, p. 133. The sixth-century Palestinian poet Yannai wrote that “They were broken in anger, the branches of the menorah.” *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Yannai* [Hebrew], ed. Z. M. Rabinovitz (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1987), 2:35. See Shulamit Elizur, *A Poem for Every Parsha: Torah Readings Reflected in the Piyutim* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1999), 226–228.

<sup>31</sup> Boustan, “Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple,” 364, who discusses additional sources; Sivsertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 125–138.

<sup>32</sup> Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 84–85. Attributions in rabbinic literature are always difficult. See *ibid.*, 62–68; William S. Green, “What’s in a Name? The Problematic of Rabbinic Biography,” in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 1:77–96; Richard Kalmin, “Talmudic Portrayals of Relationships between Rabbis: Amoraic or Pseudepigraphic?,” *AJS Review* 17, no. 2 (1992): 165–197, esp. 168–169; Steven Fine, “Between Texts and Archaeology: Nabratein and Jacob of Kefar Nevoara in Rabbinic Literature,” in E. M. and C. L. Meyers, with contributions by Steven Fine, Alysia Fischer, Joyce Raynor Meier, et al., *Ancient Synagogue Excavations at En-Nabratein, Upper Galilee, 1980–81* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 3–14.

<sup>33</sup> For this type of testimony in an aggadic context, see b. Baba Batra 73a–75b and the comments of Dina Stein, “Believing is Seeing: Baba Batra 73a–75b” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 17 (1999): 9–32.

the showbread, the menorah, the Temple veil, and a Torah scroll from the Jerusalem temple were among the booty brought to Rome in triumph by Titus and paraded through the streets of Rome (*War* 7.132–161). This event was immortalized approximately a decade later in relief panels within the Arch of Titus.<sup>34</sup> Josephus describes in detail the manner in which many of the Temple vessels were turned over to the Romans. In *War* 6.387–391 Josephus describes how a certain priest handed over to them “some of the sacred treasures,” including the following:

... λυχνίας δύο τῶν κατὰ τὸν ναὸν κειμένων παραπλησίας τραπέζας τε καὶ κρατήρας καὶ φιάλας, πάντα ὀλόχρυσά καὶ στιβαρώτατα, παραδίδωσι δὲ καὶ τὰ καταπετάσματα καὶ τὰ ἐνδύματα τῶν ἀρχιερέων σὺν τοῖς λίθοις καὶ πολλὰ τῶν πρὸς τὰς ἱερουργίας σκευῶν ἄλλα. συλληφθεὶς δὲ καὶ ὁ γαζοφύλαξ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Φινέας ὄνομα τοὺς τε χιτῶνας καὶ τὰς ζώνας ὑπέδειξε τῶν ἱερέων πορφύραν τε πολλὴν καὶ κόκκινον, ἃ πρὸς τὰς χρείας ἀπέκειτο τοῦ καταπετάσματος, σὺν οἷς κιννάμωμόν τε πολὺ καὶ κασσίαν καὶ πλῆθος ἐτέρων ἀρωμάτων, ἃ συμμίσγοντες ἐθυμίων ὁσήμεραι τῷ θεῷ. παρεδόθη δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πολλὰ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κειμηλίων κόσμος τε ἱερὸς οὐκ ὀλίγος, ἅπερ αὐτῷ βίᾳ ληφθέντι τὴν τῶν αὐτομόλων συγγνώμην ἔδωκε.

... two lampstands similar to those deposited in the sanctuary, along with tables, bowls, and platters, all of solid gold and very massive; he further delivered up veils, the high-priests’ vestments, including the precious stones, and many other articles for public worship. Furthermore, the treasurer of the temple, by the name of Phineas, being taken prisoner, disclosed the tunics and girdles worn by the priests, an abundance of purple and scarlet kept for necessary repairs to the veil of the temple, along with a mass of cinnamon and cassia and a multitude of other spices, which they mixed and burned daily as incense to God. Many other treasures also were delivered up by him, with numerous sacred ornaments; those services procuring for him, although a prisoner of war, the pardon accorded to the refugees.

In *War* 7.148–152, Josephus describes Titus’s triumphal return to Rome from his successful campaign in Judaea in great detail. His descriptions of the Temple vessels are relevant to our discussion:

λάφυρα δὲ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα χύδην ἐφέρετο, διέπρεπε δὲ πάντων τὰ ἐγκαταληφθέντα τῷ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἱερῷ, χρυσὴ τε τράπεζα τὴν ὅλην πολυτάλαντος καὶ λυχνία χρυσὴ μὲν ὁμοίως πεποιημένη, τὸ δ’ ἔργον ἐξήλλακτο τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν χρῆσιν συνηθείας. ὁ μὲν γὰρ μέσος ἦν κίων ἐκ τῆς βάσεως πεπηγώς, λεπτοὶ δ’ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ μεμήκυντο καυλίσκοι τριαίνης σχήματι παραπλησίαν τὴν θέσιν ἔχοντες,

<sup>34</sup> On the Arch of Titus in general, see Michael Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1983); and Leon Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-investigation* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1991), and the bibliography cited there.

λύχνον ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐπ' ἄκρον κεχαλκευμένος ἐπτά δ' ἦσαν οὗτοι τῆς παρὰ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐβδομάδος τὴν τιμὴν ἐμφανίζοντες. ὁ τε νόμος ὁ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐφέρετο τῶν λαφύρων τελευταῖος. ἐπὶ τούτοις παρήεσαν πολλοὶ Νίκης ἀγάλματα κομίζοντες· ἐξ ἐλέφαντος δ' ἦν πάντων καὶ χρυσοῦ ἡ κατασκευή. μεθ' ἧς Οὔεσπασιανὸς ἤλαυνε πρῶτος καὶ Τίτος εἴπετο, Δομετιανὸς δὲ παρίππευεν, αὐτὸς τε διαπρεπῶς κεκοσμημένος καὶ τὸν ἵππον παρέχων θεάς ἄξιον.

The spoils in general were borne in promiscuous heaps; but conspicuous above all stood those captured in the temple at Jerusalem. These consisted of a golden table, many talents in weight, and a lampstand, likewise made of gold, but constructed on a different pattern than those which we use in ordinary life. Affixed to a pedestal was a central shaft, from which there extended slender branches, arranged trident-fashion, a wrought lamp being attached to the extremity of each branch; of these there were seven, indicating the honor paid to that number among the Jews. After these, and last of all the spoils, was carried a copy of the Jewish Law. They followed a large party carrying images of victory, all made of ivory and gold. Behind them drove Vespasian, followed by Titus; while Domitian rode beside them, in magnificent apparel and mounted on a steed that was in itself a sight.

The descriptions of vessels taken to Rome fits well with the “inventory” provided by our rabbinic traditions. The description of the golden table of the showbread and the menorah parallels the prominent place afforded these objects on the Arch of Titus completed a decade after the triumph in 81 CE. This pairing of the menorah and the showbread table is based not just upon their proximity in the Temple, but upon both their physical impressiveness and the large quantities of gold of which each was manufactured. The fact that Josephus felt obliged to describe the menorah as being “arranged trident-fashion” is indicative of the uniqueness of this object, which adds to its visual effectiveness. The artist of the Arch of Titus panel realized this, thus emphasizing the menorah in deeper bas-relief. The menorah and table were paired earlier on a lepton of Mattathias Antigonos, minted in 39 BCE as an apparent propaganda tool to ward off the Roman-backed usurper Herod (Figure 20a–b).<sup>35</sup> The issue of proximity, which one would imagine might have little impressed the Roman artists, accounts for the apparent juxtaposition of the table and the menorah on a plaster fragment discovered in the Jewish Quarter excavations in Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Yaakov Meshorer, *A Treasure of Jewish Coins* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2001), 54–57.

<sup>36</sup> Nahman Avigad, “Excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, 1969–1971,” in *Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. Y. Yadin (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1975), 47–49.





Figures 20a–b. Lepton of Antigonus Mattathias, showing the menorah and the table of the presence, 39 BCE, collection of Shlomo Moussaieff (courtesy of George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies).

Many of the Temple vessels were eventually deposited, according to Josephus, in Vespasian's Temple of Peace. This temple was built to commemorate the Flavian defeat of Judaea. The Templum Pacis was begun in 71, completed in 75 CE, and later rebuilt by Domitian. It was constructed on the southern side of the Argiletum, a road that connected the Subura to the Forum.<sup>37</sup> Pliny the Elder includes the Temple of Peace among Rome's "noble buildings," listing it among "the most beautiful [buildings] the world has ever seen."<sup>38</sup> The square was surrounded by porticoes, which enclosed a pleasure garden. It also contained a library. The temple was integrated into the east portico. As Josephus describes it, the Temple of Peace contained quite a collection of artifacts from throughout the empire:

Μετὰ δὲ τοὺς θριάμβους καὶ τὴν βεβαιωτάτην τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας κατάστασιν Οὐεσπασιανὸς ἔγνω τέμενος Εἰρήνης κατασκευάσαι· ταχὺ δὲ δὴ μάλα καὶ πάσης ἀνθρωπίνης κρείττον ἐπινοίας ἐτετελείωτο. τῇ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ πλούτου χορηγία δαιμονίῳ χρησάμενος ἔτι καὶ τοῖς ἐκπαλαὶ κατωρθωμένοις γραφῆς τε καὶ πλαστικῆς ἔργοις αὐτὸ κατεκόσμησεν· πάντα γὰρ εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν νεῶ συνήχθη καὶ κατετέθη,

<sup>37</sup> James A. Anderson, "Domitian, the Argiletum, and the Temple of Peace," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86, no. 1 (1982): 101–110; L. Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 286–287; J. B. Ward-Perkins, "Constantine and the Origins of the Christian Basilica," *Papers and Monographs of the British School at Rome* 22 (1954): 69–90.

<sup>38</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 36.102, trans. D. E. Eichholz, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

δι' ὧν τὴν θέαν ἄνθρωποι πρότερον περὶ πᾶσαν ἐπλανῶντο τὴν οἰκουμένην, ἕως ἄλλο παρ' ἄλλοις ἦν κείμενον ἰδεῖν ποθοῦντες. ἀνέθηκε δὲ ἐνταῦθα καὶ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων χρυσὰ κατασκευάσματα σεμνυνόμενος ἐπ' αὐτοῖς. τὸν δὲ νόμον αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ πορφυρᾶ τοῦ σηκοῦ καταπετάσματα προσέταξεν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀποθεμένους φυλάττειν.

The triumphal ceremonies being concluded and the empire of the Romans established on the firmest foundation, Vespasian decided to erect a temple of Peace. This was very speedily completed and in a style surpassing all human conception. For, besides having prodigious resources of wealth on which to draw he also embellished it with ancient masterworks of painting and sculpture; indeed, into that shrine were accumulated and stored all objects for the sight of which men had once wandered over the whole world, eager to see them severally while they lay in various countries. Here, too, he laid up the vessels of gold from the temple of the Jews, on which he prided himself; but the Law and the purple hangings of the sanctuary he ordered to be deposited and kept in the palace.<sup>39</sup>

As Paul Zanker aptly suggests, “the opulence and variety of the furnishings stood as a symbol for Rome as the center of the world.”<sup>40</sup> The rabbinic viewing of the menorah and the table could have taken place in this temple, paralleled by the then-polychromy bas-reliefs of the Arch of Titus. One might suspect that many Jews, both natives of Rome and visitors, might have come to the Temple of Peace and the Arch to view the Temple items, even as Jews to this day flock to the Arch of Titus.<sup>41</sup>

Josephus has it that the Temple veil and the scroll of the Torah were placed in Vespasian's palace. The imperial palace was a partially public space, as the White House is in modern America. As Vitruvius suggests, in homes of the powerful “the common rooms are those into which, though uninvited, persons of the people can come by right, such as vestibules, courtyards, peristyles and other apartments of similar uses.”<sup>42</sup> Referring to the Palatine, Pliny notes that “Imperial mansions were often filled with excellent statues.”<sup>43</sup> Little is known of the Domus Vespasianus, where the Temple vessels were apparently displayed. It was probably the same building as the Domus Titus Flavius Vespasianus, later rebuilt by Domitian

<sup>39</sup> War 7.158–162.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Zanker, “In Search of the Roman Viewer,” in *The Interpretation of Architectural Sculpture in Greece and Rome*, ed. D. Buitron-Oliver (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 187.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Boustán, *The Spoils of Jerusalem*, 337–338.

<sup>42</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 6.5.

<sup>43</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 39.4.38.

as the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*.<sup>44</sup> Important artifacts were displayed in the *Domus Titus*. Pliny suggests that the Laocoön was exhibited there as well as Polycleitos of Sicyon's "Two Boys Playing Dice, likewise in the nude, known by the Greek name of *Astragalizontes* and now standing in the atrium of the Emperor Titus (*Titi imperatorius atrio*)." Pliny adds that "this is considered the most perfect work of art in existence."<sup>45</sup> Of the Laocoön, Pliny writes that it is "in the palace of General Titus, a work superior to any painting and any bronze. Laocoön, his children and the wonderful clasping coils of the snakes were carved of a single block."<sup>46</sup> It is not inconceivable (though certainly a jump) that the Temple veil and the Torah scroll were part of the same public/private collection, displayed in the same palace. The Laocoön was discovered on that site January 14, 1506, and significantly impacted Renaissance and later art.<sup>47</sup> The Temple implements, of course, are lost.

The Babylonian Talmud (Meilah 17b) places the *parokhet* in the personal and very private "treasury of the emperor," though this text says more about late Babylonian rabbinic storytelling than about the historical *parokhet*. The enigmatic statement in Tosefta Kippurim that someone told Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose that "these are from the blood of the Day of Atonement" suggests that many had seen the veil, and that there was some sort of local tradition that existed before Rabbi Eleazar raised his question. One can almost imagine Rabbi Eleazar going to see the *parokhet*, perhaps in the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*, and discussing the spots with local Jews.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the context, what is certain from Josephus is that the sacred vessels were deposited and on view within Vespasian's palace during the later first century.

The Torah scroll that Josephus describes having been deposited in Vespasian's palace finds an intriguing parallel in a tradition preserved in

<sup>44</sup> Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary*, 137–138, 140.

<sup>45</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 34.19.55.

<sup>46</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 39.4.37.

<sup>47</sup> Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary*, 137–138; Margerete Bieber, *Laocoon: The Influence of the Group since Its Rediscovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 1.

<sup>48</sup> The evidence is surveyed by Harry J. Leon, *The Jews in Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 46–74, 195–228, 263–346; *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, vol. 2, *The City of Rome*, ed. David Noy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

an eleventh-century collection, *Bereshit Rabbati*.<sup>49</sup> According to this tradition, a scroll from the Temple was brought from Jerusalem, and eventually deposited in a Rome synagogue:

הוא מן מליא דכתיבן באורייתא דנפקת מן ירושלם בשביתא וסלקת לרומי והות  
גניזא בכנישתא דאסוירוס

This is one of the words which were written in the scroll that was captured in Jerusalem and was brought to Rome and was stored in the synagogue of Severos.

The description of this scroll as using what later came to be called the medial *mem* and the final *mem* indiscriminately fits well with first-century Jerusalemite orthographic practice, as scholars have long noted.<sup>50</sup> The disposition of Temple booty within a local synagogue is known from Seleucid times, when vessels of the Jerusalem temple were placed in an Antioch synagogue by Antiochus IV. Such a dispersal of Jewish sacred artifacts is thus not beyond the imaginations of Roman Jews. In *War* 7.44–45 Josephus writes:

Ἀντίοχος μὲν γὰρ κληθεὶς Ἐπιφανὴς Ἱεροσόλυμα πορβήσας τὸν νεὼν ἐσύλησεν, οἱ δὲ μετ' αὐτὸν τὴν βασιλείαν παραλαβόντες τῶν ἀναθημάτων ὅσα χαλκᾷ πεποίητο πάντα τοῖς ἐπ' Ἀντιοχείας Ἰουδαίοις ἀπέδοσαν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτῶν ἀναθέντες, καὶ συνεχώρησαν αὐτοῖς ἐξ Ἰσοῦ τῆς πόλεως τοῖς Ἑλλήσι μετέχειν. τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα βασιλέων αὐτοῖς προσφερομένων εἰς τε πλῆθος ἐπέδωκαν καὶ τῇ κατασκευῇ καὶ τῇ πολυτελείᾳ τῶν ἀναθημάτων τὸ ἱερὸν ἐξελάμπρυναν.

For, although Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem and plundered the Temple, his successors on the throne restored to the Jews of Antioch all such votive offerings that were made of brass, to be laid up in the synagogue and, moreover, granted them citizenship rights on equality with the Greeks. Continuing to receive similar treatment from later monarchs, the Jewish colony grew in numbers, and their richly designed and costly offerings formed a costly ornament to the temple.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Midrash Bereshith Rabbathi*, ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 700, 1940). *Va-Yigash* 45:8, and Albeck's notes, pp. 210–211.

<sup>50</sup> Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1940), 23–24; eadem, “Ketovet Uzياهو ve-Toratan shel Rishonim,” *Tarbiz* 4 (1933): 292–293.

<sup>51</sup> See Solomon Zeitlin, “Tefillah, the Shemoneh Esreh: An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Liturgy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 54 (1963–1964): 236; Heather A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 81–82.

What is significant is that a Jewish community in Rome perceived itself as possessing such a relic of the Temple, transferred apparently by the Romans themselves to the Jewish community. Some scholars have associated the Synagogue of Severos with the second-century emperor Alexander Severos.<sup>52</sup> The Severan dynasty is presented in rabbinic thought as having been particularly friendly toward the Jews, and a temple was even dedicated "to fulfill a vow of the Jews" to Marcus Aurelius at Qasion on the border of the Upper Galilee and Phoenicia.<sup>53</sup> If there is indeed an association between the synagogue of Severos and Septimus Severos, the transfer of a Torah scroll taken from Jerusalem for storage there would be all the more significant.

Let us return for a moment to Sifre Zuta's description of the Temple menorah. There we read that "all of the lamps were inclined toward the central lamp." This purportedly eyewitness evidence concludes an anonymous academic discussion of the Temple menorah's lamp arrangement, and is the ultimate support for accepting the position that "all of the lamps were inclined toward the central flame," interpreting Numbers 8:2–3:

דָּבַר אֶל אֶהֱרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהִעָלְתָּךְ אֶת הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שְׁבַעֲת הַנֵּרוֹת: וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן אֶהֱרֹן אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה הָעֵלָה נִרְתְּיָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֶת מֹשֶׁה:

Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you raise up the lamps, opposite the face of the menorah (אל-מול פני המנורה) shall the seven lamps shine. And Aaron did thus: opposite the face of the menorah he raised up its lamps just as Moses had commanded.

The attempt to focus of all of the lamps toward the central one, as my somewhat stilted translation of אל-מול פני המנורה suggests, is well known outside the rabbinic corpus as well, perhaps as early as the Jerusalem graf-fito from before 70, and certainly from late antique archaeological contexts. We see this, for example, in the Hammath Tiberias B synagogue mosaic<sup>54</sup> and the Beth Shean small "synagogue" (more likely, study house)

<sup>52</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, "Severo Alessandro Archisynagogus," *Athenaeum* 12 (1934): 151–153; Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 162–165.

<sup>53</sup> Lea Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions in the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi Institute, 1987), 125–129, and the bibliography cited there; Steven Fine, "Non-Jews in the Synagogues of Palestine: Rabbinic and Archaeological Perspectives," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 226–230.

<sup>54</sup> Moshe Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias: Early Synagogues* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 37–38.



Figure 21. Menorah fragment from a marble frieze, Andriake, Asia Minor (courtesy of Nevzat Çevik).

mosaic (Figure 37a–c).<sup>55</sup> A recently discovered fragment of a marble frieze from Andriake, the ancient port of Myra on the southern coast of Asia Minor, seems to represent a similar arrangement of lamps aligned toward the central lamp of a menorah (Figure 21).<sup>56</sup> Formally, this is a natural way to arrange the lamps such that the menorah (or images of the menorah) would be a self-contained and self-referential image. If this text merely reflects the Palestinian context, it supplies the “missing link” between of the literary and the visual evidence.

What, though, if Rabbi Simeon (or others of the rabbinic community) really did see the menorah, and its lamps were in fact directed toward the central lamp? In that case, the visual midrash at Hammath Tiberias may reflect actual knowledge of the Temple menorah that goes beyond rabbinic speculation. Significantly, images of the menorah from the Roman catacombs, which date to the fourth century, often depict the lamps atop the menorah’s branches inclined toward the central stalk. We

<sup>55</sup> Dan Bahat, “A Synagogue at Beth-Shean,” in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 82–85; Fine, *This Holy Place*, 100–101.

<sup>56</sup> Nevzat Çevik, Özgü Çömezoglu, Hüseyin Sami Öztürk, and İnci Türkoğlu, “A Unique Discovery in Lycia: The Ancient Synagogue at Andrake, Port of Myra,” *Adalya* 13 (2010): 342–344, fig. 38.





Figure 22. Villa Torlonia catacomb, Rome (after A. Reifenberg, *Denkmäler der jüdischen Antike* [Berlin: Schocken, 1937], pl. 53).

see this, for example, in wall paintings from the Villa Torlonia catacomb (Figure 22).<sup>57</sup> Are these based upon an interpretation of Numbers 8:2 that was also known to the rabbis? What if this imagery was drawn from actual observation of the Temple menorah? In short, our Sifre Zuta passage raises questions regarding the accessibility of the Menorah in Rome, what was actually seen there, and of Palestinian relations with the Jews of Rome.

What, then, may we say about the Temple vessels in Rome during the century or so after 70? Josephus's descriptions of the presence of the menorah and the showbread table is verified by the Arch of Titus reliefs. The presence of the menorah, the veil, and a Temple Torah scroll is expressed in rabbinic sources as well. Sources describe rabbis viewing these vessels, as well as the head plate of the high priest. This piece is not mentioned by Josephus. While it would be easy to dismiss these rabbinic sources as

<sup>57</sup> The illustrations are most conveniently arranged in Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 3, nos. 769, 808, 810, 817, 973.



mere literary devices, or as folklore, the external evidence—from Josephus, from the Arch of Titus, from the Jewish catacombs of Rome, and from Palestinian archaeology—does not facilitate a quick dismissal of the rabbinic evidence. The sages clearly knew that the menorah and other vessels continued to exist in Rome long after the destruction of the Temple, and were on public view.

I should note that I am far from the first to ask how it is that the rabbis could actually have seen the vessels. The sages of the Babylonian Talmud, who were distant from the world of Roman palaces, pleasure gardens, and forums, were also bothered by this question. Their solution assumes a less public and considerably more nefarious deposition of the *parokhet*. A tale told in Meilah 17a–b focuses upon the Jewish presence in Rome, and quickly turns to an alleged Roman decree that forbade the Jews from keeping the Sabbath, from circumcising their sons, and required them to have sexual intercourse with menstruant women. The remainder of the pericope deals with ways that the Jews worked to reverse the decree. Our narrative grafts Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose and his comments on seeing the *parokhet* to the present context. Simeon son of Yoḥai, our text tells us, was sent as the emissary to the emperor's house. En route he met a demon named Ben Temalion. Intending to help Rabbi Simeon, and with his assent, Ben Temalion “advanced and entered into the Emperor's daughter.” When Rabbi Simeon arrived there, he demonstrably carried out an exorcism, calling out:

בן תמליון צא! בן תמליון צא!  
וכיון דקרו ליה -נפק אזל.  
אמר להון  
שאילו כל מה דאית לכון למישאל  
ועיילינהו לגנזיה לשקול כל דבעו  
אשכחו ההוא איגרא שקלוה וקרעוה  
והיינו דאמר רבי אלעזר בר רבי יוסי: אני ראיתיה בעיר רומי והווי עליה כמה  
טיפי דמים.

“Ben Temalion leave her, Ben Temalion leave her!”

and as he said this, he left her.

He [the Emperor] said to them [to Rabbi Simeon and to Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose]:

Request whatever you desire.

They were led into the treasure house to take whatever they chose.

They found the decree, took it and tore it up.

It was in reference to this that Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Yose said:

"I saw it (the *parokhet*) in the city of Rome and there were on it several drops of blood."<sup>58</sup>

Benjamin of Tudela (second half of the twelfth century) is the next source to describe the holy vessels of the Temple in Rome, using some similar terminology in his travelogue. Benjamin suggests that medieval Romans had a tradition that the Temple vessels were in Christian hands:

ושם בשלח יינאי אל תיאני הבמה שני עמודים נחושת שהיו בבית המקדש ממעשי שלמה המלך ע"ה. ובכל עמוד ועמוד חקוק שלמה בן דוד. ואמרו היהודים אנשי רומה כי בכל שנה ושנה ביום ט' מצאו זיעה עליהם נגרת כמו מים. ושם מערה שגנו טיטוס בן אספסינוס כלי בית המקדש שהביא מירושלים.

In the church of St. John in the Lateran there are two copper columns that were in the Temple, the handiwork of King Solomon, peace be upon him. Upon each column is inscribed "Solomon son of David." The Jews of Rome said that each year on the Ninth of Av they found moisture running down them like water. There also is the cave where Titus the son of Vespasian hid away (שגנו) the Temple vessels which he brought from Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

While the supposed columns of "Solomon son of David" were in full sight, the vessels of the Second Temple, brought by Titus to Rome, were thought to be hidden away. Benjamin uses the verb *ganaz*, to hide, to describe the dispersal of the vessels by Titus. This parallels our Meilah passage, where the *parokhet* was hidden away with the decree against the Jews in the king's treasure house, his *genizah*. One wonders, therefore, whether Benjamin's account draws upon our tradition or whether the linguistic parallel is accidental. In any event, Benjamin of Tudela provides important evidence that medieval Roman Jews did indeed believe that vessels of the Second Temple were in Rome, under Christian auspices.

Tractate Meilah's almost nefarious example of the *parokhet* hidden in the emperor's treasure house provides a talmudic template for contemporary mythmaking about menorah sightings at the Vatican. The modern rabbis—the American Orthodox rabbi, "Rabbi Pinto," and even "Rabbi Herzog," who some contemporary Jews earnestly believe entered the Vatican in search of the menorah—give life to this myth and its associated

<sup>58</sup> See Rashi, Tosafot, ad loc.; Wilhelm Bacher, "La legende de l'exorcisme d'un demon par Simon B. Yohai," *Revue des Études Juives*, 35 (1897): 285–287; Meir Bar-Ilan, "Exorcism by Rabbis: Talmudic Sages and Magic" [Hebrew], *Da'at*, 34 (1995): 17–31.

<sup>59</sup> Mortimer N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (New York: Philip Feldheim, 1967), 7, Hebrew section 8.

distrust of Christians. Contemporary Jews, particularly Orthodox Jews, have been known to reenact this myth in their own searches of the Vatican for the menorah, providing a Jewish overlay for their own touristic (and often emotionally conflicted) forays into the holiest site of Roman Christendom. As we have seen, even the Israeli minister of religious affairs participated in this myth, merging it with traditional Zionist imagery of returning the menorah home thorough the Zionist enterprise. With Rabbi Simeon, all of these contemporary searchers (and not a few academic scholars—myself among them) would like nothing more than to be able to say: “When I was in Rome . . . there I saw the menorah.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Steven Fine, “‘Said Rabbi Shimon: When I went to Rome, there I saw the Menorah . . .’ Some Personal Reflections on the YU Center for Israel Studies’ Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project,” in *Tisha Be’Av to Go 5772* (New York: Yeshiva University, 2012), 21–24, <http://www.yutorah.org/togo/tishabav/> (accessed May 2012).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COLORING THE TEMPLE: POLYCHROMY AND THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE IN LATE ANTIQUITY



Figure 23. Model of the Herodian Temple by Michael Avi Yonah, Israel Museum (photograph by Steven Fine).

Color, as we have seen, is a relatively new subject in the study of Roman and early Byzantine cultural history, and has not been a focus of interest in Jewish studies either.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is directly related both to Central European neoclassicism and modernist aesthetics, both of which considered whiteness to be an expression of purity, sophistication, and power. This phenomenon has been called “chromophobia” by one

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Iris: Studies in Colour and Talks about Flowers*, trans. Alexander Cusin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889).

scholar,<sup>2</sup> and continues to impact the ways that classical art is presented in most museums.<sup>3</sup> This chromophobia became significant in Jewish terms through neoclassical and modernist impulses in synagogue architecture—and in modern Israel owing to the focus on Bauhaus aesthetics in the creation of the “new Jew” and his “White City,” Tel Aviv.<sup>4</sup> The aesthetics of whiteness are expressed as well in Michael Avi-Yonah’s model of Second Temple Jerusalem (Figure 23), which in its original context fit seamlessly within the gardens of the Holy Land Hotel—a building designed in the International style using Jerusalem white limestone.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, scholars have developed tools to discern the polychromy of classical sculpture and architecture.<sup>6</sup> Often using noninvasive computer scanning and other techniques, researchers have uncovered signs of ancient polychromy. Taken together with literary sources that have received renewed and intensive attention,<sup>7</sup> scholars have attempted both to reconstruct the original polychromy of classical art and architecture

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<sup>2</sup> David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000). An example of “chromophobia” in relation to my own work on the polychromy of the Arch of Titus (<http://yu.edu/cis/activities/arch-of-titus>) appeared on *The New Republic* website. See Rochelle Gurstein, “In Praise of Ruins: What the Fallen Grandeur of Ancient Rome Teaches Us,” *The New Republic*, June 3, 2012, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/104636/hed>.

<sup>3</sup> The Israel Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art are two of the most prominent museums that favor whiteness in their recent reinstallations of their classical collections.

<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Levin, *White City: International Style Architecture in Israel: A Portrait of an Era* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum, 1984); Shmuel Yavin and Ran Erde, *Revival of the Bauhaus in Tel Aviv: Renovation of the International Style in the White City* (Tel Aviv: Bauhaus Center, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The architect was Zoltan Harmat. See [he.wikipedia.org/wiki/זולטן\\_שמשון\\_הרמט](http://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/זולטן_שמשון_הרמט). See Yoram Tsafrir, “Designing the Model of Jerusalem at the Holyland Hotel: Hans Zvi Kroch, Michael Avi-Yonah and an Unpublished Guidebook” [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 140 (2011): 47–86.

<sup>6</sup> Vinzenz Brinkmann and Raimund Wünsche, *Bunte Götter: Die Farbigkeit antiker Skulptur* (Munich: Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, 2004); eadem, *Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity*: Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Sept. 22, 2007–Jan. 20, 2008 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2007); Panzanelli, ed., *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*. See also C. Sorek and E. Ayalon, *Colors from Nature: Natural Cultures in Ancient Times* [Hebrew with English summaries] (Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 1993). The history of polychromy scholarship is admirably moderated by Mark Bradley, *Colour and Meaning in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12–30.

<sup>7</sup> See especially Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, and Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996); eadem, “Color and Meaning in Byzantium,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2003): 223–233.

and thus to completely reimagine the role of color in the Greco-Roman world, replacing the stark ghost-like whiteness to which we have become accustomed since the Renaissance. In this essay I turn to a literary tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 51b and Baba Batra 4a, that is relevant to our understanding of polychromy in late antiquity. Unusually, this tradition reflects both the Roman context and the far less known Sasanian environment, imagining the Jerusalem temple in color. I will attempt a thick description of this tradition in terms of the architecture of late antiquity on both sides of the imperial divide.

Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 51b reads thusly:

[תנו רבנן: מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימי  
מי שלא ראה ירושלים בתפארתה לא ראה כרך נחמד מעולם]  
מי שלא ראה בית המקדש בבנינו לא ראה בנין מפואר מעולם  
מאי היא?  
אמר אביי ואיתימא רב חסדא: זה בנין הורדוס.  
במאי בניה?  
אמר רבא [רבה]<sup>8</sup>: באבני שישא כוחלא ומרמרא  
איכא דאמרי: באבני שישא כוחלא ומרמרא  
אפיק שפה ועייל שפה, כי היכי דלקבל סידא  
סבר למשעיין בדהבא,  
אמרו ליה רבנן: שבקיה, דהכי שפיר טפי, דמיתחזי כאדותא דימא

- [1. Our Rabbis taught: One who never saw the festival of the water drawing never saw happiness (= m. Sukkah 5:1).
2. One who never saw Jerusalem in her glory never saw a fine city.]
3. One who never saw the Temple as it was built never saw a glorious building.
4. To which [Temple does this refer]?
5. Said Abbaye, or perhaps Rav Ḥisda: This is the building of Herod.
6. Of what did he build it?
7. Said Rabba [Rava]: Of stones of *shisha* and *marmara*.
8. Some say: stones of *shisha*, *kuhla* and *marmara*.
9. He sent out a course and brought in a course [of stones] so that it could receive plaster.
10. He intended at first to overlay it with gold.
11. Our Rabbis said to him: "Leave it alone, for it is more beautiful as it is, for it looks like the waves of the sea.

Lines 4–11, the focus of this study, are distinctly Babylonian/Sasanian in origin and have no parallels in Palestinian literature. The rabbis cited by

<sup>8</sup> Raphael Rabinovitch, *Diqduqe Sofrim: Variae Lectiones in Mischnam et in Talmud Babylonicum* [Hebrew] (Munich: A. Huber, 1868–1897; reprint, New York: M. P. Press, 1976), ad loc.

name in this passage were renowned Babylonian tradents of the third and fourth Amoraic generations, having flourished during the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era.<sup>9</sup> The literary frames in which our tradition appears in b. Sukkah 51b and in b. Baba Batra 4b are very different. In b. Sukkah 51b, clearly the origin of this tradition, the claim for the beauty of the Temple (line 3) is the last of three Tannaitic traditions that describe in a parallel formula the glories of the “Festival of the Water Drawing,” *Simhat Beit ha-Sho’eva*—a part of the Temple festivities on the festival of Sukkot—and the glories of Jerusalem. Following our lines 5–11, the Sukkah pericope continues with a fourth parallel tradition, this one in the name of a named *tanna* that begins: “Said Rabbi Judah [bar Ilai]: One who never saw the double colonnade of Alexandria of Egypt has never seen the great glory of Israel in his entire life.”<sup>10</sup> The Talmud has implanted this Babylonian Amoraic tradition within this group of Tannaitic sources to illustrate further the glories of the Temple, imagining and projecting contemporaneous late antique construction techniques and rabbinic values onto Herod’s Temple—even as it limits the opulence by not allowing Herod to cover the Temple with gold.

In Baba Batra, by contrast, our tradition is enlisted in a broader discussion of Herod and his relationship with the rabbis. As Geoffrey Hartman and Jeffrey Rubenstein have independently shown, this pericope broadly parallels and draws upon foundation narratives of the Sasanian dynasty relating to the rise of Ardashir I, founder of the dynasty.<sup>11</sup> The problem of this text is how Herod, considered by the pericope to have begun as an evil usurper, became the righteous king who built the Temple. The focus rests upon Herod’s transformation from a killer of rabbis to a follower of the rabbis, the Temple reconstruction serving as a marker of this personal transformation. It is set as a statement of Herod’s eventual rehabilitation through architecture, the complexities of his undulating relationship with Rome, and most importantly, his acceptance of rabbinic authority—

<sup>9</sup> See the relevant entries in Chanoch Albeck, *Introduction to the Talmud, Bavli and Yerushalmi* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> = t. Megillah 4:6. See Fine, *This Holy Place*, 43–45.

<sup>11</sup> See Geoffrey Herman, “The Stable-master of Rabbi was Richer than King Shābūr”—On Persian Literary Influences in the Babylonian Aggadah” [Hebrew], lecture before the Departmental Seminar of the Talmud Department, Bar-Ilan University, November 15, 2004; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “King Herod in Ardashir’s Court: The Rabbinic Story of Herod (Bava Batra 3b–4a) in Light of Persian Sources,” in *Irano-Judaica* 7 (forthcoming). Many thanks to Professors Herman and Rubenstein for sharing their essays with me prior to publication.



exemplified by acceptance of the rabbis' sumptuary limitation that kept him from covering the Temple in gold.

Since medieval times, scholars have sought to identify the colors of the stone described in this tradition, and like contemporary scholars of ancient color they have had difficulty identifying color words with specific hues.<sup>12</sup> *Shayish* and *marmara* are reasonably easy to identify—*shayish* in biblical and many rabbinic sources refers to white polished limestone, and also to a type of (white?) marble by our period.<sup>13</sup> *Marmara*, a loan-word from Greek, clearly refers to marble, which, as the rabbis were surely aware, was available in a broad range of colors. The specific denotation of *marmara* is lost.<sup>14</sup> *Kuḥla* has been a problem as well, with Gershom b. Jacob (d. 1028) identifying it as "black" (*shaḥor*) and Rashi, Solomon son of Isaac (d. 1105), as "blue" (*kaḥol*), by reading contextually and looking for a denotation that relates to the color of the waves mentioned in line 11. Tsiona Grossmark diplomatically suggests that *kuḥla* is a "dark color."<sup>15</sup> Kohl in English,<sup>16</sup> *kuḥla* refers to a broad spectrum of dark colors, ranging from dark red through the greens, blues, grays, and black—all shades of which were used as a cosmetic by women in antiquity.<sup>17</sup> Our text thus imagines a facade consisting of rows of dark and light—or alternatively,

<sup>12</sup> The problem of denotation is intrinsic to all studies of ancient color. See Bradley, *Colour and Meaning*, 1–12. Itamar Even-Zohar reflects upon problems of denotation in the development of modern Hebrew, with clear implications for earlier periods. See his "What did Gitl Cook and what did Čičkov Eat: On the Status of Denotation in Hebrew Literary Language since the Revival Period" [Hebrew] *ha-Sifrut* 23 (1976), 1–6; English summary, i–ii.

<sup>13</sup> Rashi describes it as *yarok*, "green," apparently based upon a contextual reading of line 10. See Moshe L. Fischer, "'...on Parian pillars' (The Book of Esther 1:6): Bible, Midrash and Real Marble in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50, no. 2 (1999): 236–245.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. See also Moshe L. Fischer, *Marble Studies: Roman Palestine and the Marble Trade* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1998), *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Tsiona Grossmark, "'Shayish' (marble) in Rabbinic Literature," in M. L. Fischer, *Marble Studies: Roman Palestine and the Marble Trade* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1998), 274–284, esp. 277. See Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 558, and the philological discussion there.

<sup>16</sup> "Kohl," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/104261?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=mLX1BZ&> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>17</sup> See Alexander Kohut, *Aruch Completum* (New York: Pardes, 1955), 3:213–215. Note Eliezer Ben Yehuda's difficulty in defining the word *kaḥol*: "the color *kaḥol* is neither green (*yarok*) nor black (*shaḥor*)." See his *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Makor, 1980), 5:2320.

dark, light, and lighter—stone, which is associated with the moving yet parallel colors of sea waves.

Seeking out a Roman architectural context that could explain the stone patterning of our tradition, Samuel Krauss, followed more recently by Tsiona Grossmark, rightly focused upon Roman *opus sectile*, inlaid marble pieces of various colors.<sup>18</sup> This very expensive technique was quite popular among the Roman aristocracy, particularly in the time of Augustus. It appears in the flooring of the theatre of Caesarea Maritima and in the bathhouses of Jericho, Cypros, Herodium, and Masada,<sup>19</sup> though marble was not generally imported as a luxury building material in late Second Temple Judaea.<sup>20</sup> By the second century, however, the use of imported marble had broadened, and this popularity continued throughout antiquity.<sup>21</sup> Not knowing how common this material was in late antique contexts in Palestine, Krauss suggests that “their [the rabbis’] eyes had seen the glory that was done with this [*opus sectile*] in Rome, all the beautiful and costly varieties of marble with which the Roman decorated the walls of their homes, many, many varieties of marble, whose very names were not known to past generations” (my translation).<sup>22</sup>

Yet this interpretation is not sufficient for this text, which claims that Herod hoped to plaster over the stones and gild the facade of the Temple. No evidence of which I am aware exists for plastering and covering such rare materials as used in *opus sectile*, which would be truly opulent. Plastering and coloring of lesser materials, however, is well known. Carefully patterned courses of brick and stone, usually plastered and painted, were common features of Roman architecture. Examples are common in *opus incertum*, *opus reticulatum* (mainly, thought not exclusively, in Italy), and *opus mixum*.<sup>23</sup> These were often polychrome and patterned. In some cases, inscriptions were inserted into the brickwork. Closer to the time

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Krauss, *Qadmoniot ha-Talmud* [Hebrew] (Berlin-Vienna: Moriah, 1923), 1/2:251–252; followed by Grossmark, “‘Shayish,’” 277.

<sup>19</sup> Fischer and Stein, “Josephus on the Use of Marble,” 81; Sylvia Rosenberg, “Interior Decoration in Herod’s Palaces,” in *Herod the Great: The King’s Final Journey*, ed. S. Rozenberg and D. Mevorah (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2013), 110–115.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Fischer, *Marble Studies*, 35, 231–240, 245–268; eadem, “Marble, Ideology and Urbanism in Roman Palestine: The Caesarea Example,” in *Caesarea Maritima: A Retrospective after Two Millennia*, ed. Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 251–261.

<sup>22</sup> Krauss, *Qadmoniot ha-Talmud*, 252.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Pierre Adam, *Roman Building: Materials and Techniques*, trans. A. Mathews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 127–150; Fischer, *Marble Studies*, 36–37.



Figure 24. Model of the Herodian Temple by Leen Ritmeyer, Yeshiva University Museum (courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer).

and place of our tradition, Theodosian II's fifth-century CE walls of Constantinople are a particularly notable example.

For our Sukkah/Baba Batra tradition, the idea of a temple faced with gold is an attempt by Herod to assert his piety (in Baba Batra, a new-found piety) in a way that the anonymous rabbis of our tradition found ostentatious. While stating that it was raised as a possibility, our tradition asserts that this was not carried out. Josephus claims that Herod actually did carry this out. In his *Jewish War*, completed before 80 CE, Josephus explicitly writes of the Temple facade that “the entire face was covered with gold” (κεχρύσωτο δὲ τὰ μέτωπα πάντα, *War* 5.208), and so he must have assumed that this level of opulence must not have been beyond the credulity of his Roman audience.<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, this text served as the starting point for Leen Ritmeyer's models, now at Yeshiva University Museum (Figure 24).

<sup>24</sup> Trans. Thackeray, 3.262–263.

Josephus did not make this claim in *Antiquities of the Jews*, around 90 CE. Moshe Fischer and Alla Stein have shown that Josephus exaggerated in *War* 5.190, claiming that the stone used in the Temple portico was “marble,” when in fact he more accurately described the limestone of the Temple in *Ant.* 15.116 as “polished stone.”<sup>25</sup> In building his now-iconic image of the Temple at the Holy Land Hotel (now at the Israel Museum), Michael Avi-Yonah adhered to a cautious approach following *Antiquities*, Augustan models,<sup>26</sup> images of the Temple in the Dura Europos synagogue,<sup>27</sup> Tacitus,<sup>28</sup> and the general *Tendenz* of Tannaitic sources—which assume gold adornments, but not a golden facade.<sup>29</sup>

The notion that Herod might wish to face the Temple with gold in our Sukkah/Baba Batra tradition may be building upon Tannaitic descriptions of the Herodian temple itself, most comprehensively t. Kippurim 2:3–4.<sup>30</sup> This text describes the donation of copious amounts of gold to the Temple, including the anonymous replacement of all of the doors with golden ones, except for those donated by Nicanor of Alexandria. These were of “Corinthian bronze” that “shone like gold.” In fact, Corinthian bronze did appear golden, as it was an alloy of bronze mixed with gold.<sup>31</sup> Helene of Adiabene and her son Munbaz (Monobazus) are said to have donated copious amounts of gold, and a plaque inscribed with Numbers 5:11–31 (on the *sota* or “wanton woman”) that Helena donated is said to have “sparkled” when the first rays of light hit it each morning. A “golden vine” that hung on the facade as well is mentioned by Josephus, Tacitus, and the

<sup>25</sup> Moshe Fischer and Alla Stein, “Josephus on the Use of Marble in Building Projects of Herod the Great,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 45, no. 1 (1994): 81–84.

<sup>26</sup> As Paul Zanker put it, “gleaming white temple facades, built of marble from the new quarries near Luni (Carrara), with their dazzling ornament, sometimes of real gold, became hallmarks of the new age.” See his *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 105.

<sup>27</sup> Carl H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue: The Excavations at Dura Europos, Final Report VIII, Part I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 22–23, 60–61.

<sup>28</sup> Tacitus, *History* 5.5.

<sup>29</sup> See Avi-Yonah’s discussion of his sources, “The Facade of Herod’s Temple: An Attempted Reconstruction,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 326–335, though Avi-Yonah does not discuss issues of color.

<sup>30</sup> The relevant texts are discussed by Steven Fine and Noah Greenfield, “‘Remembered for Praise’: Some Ancient Sources on Benefaction to Herod’s Temple,” *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture* 2 (2008): 166–171.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Levene and Beno Rothenberg, *A Metallurgical Gemara: Metals in the Jewish Sources* (London: The Institute for Archaeo-metallurgical Studies and Thames and Hudson, 2007), 70–72.

Mishnah, and may be depicted on Bar Kokhba tetradrachma.<sup>32</sup> Neither the rabbis—nor the painters of the Dura Europos synagogue, for that matter—seem to have known of Josephus’s claim that the Temple was actually faced with gold. One could imagine that this kind of legend could easily develop—just as the gold furnishings of the Alexandria synagogue and legendary throne of Solomon have become demonstratively more lavish with time.<sup>33</sup> Leaving the Temple with the bricks showing would constitute a bit of rabbinically sponsored distancing from what was perceived as over-the-top ostentation, even for Herod. It certainly fits well with rabbinic predilections in mourning for the temple, as reflected in t. Sotah 15:12 and parallels encouraging homebuilders to leave a bit of the house unplastered “in memory of Jerusalem.”<sup>34</sup>

No evidence exists of Roman temples with golden facades that might provide a context for Josephus’s apparently exaggerated claim that the Temple facade was golden, though the use of gold was profligate in Roman imperial architecture. In the first study of polychromy in the exterior decoration of a Roman temple, Stephan Zink, together with Heinrich Piening, examined the exterior of the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. These scholars suggest that “while large parts of the temple retained white marble, capitals and entablature were prominently highlighted in gold and yellow ochre.”<sup>35</sup> This analysis bodes well for the study of other temple exteriors from Roman antiquity, including perhaps extant elements of the Jerusalem temple.

Domitian is known to have gilt the doors and the bronze roof tiles of his reconstructed Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on Rome’s Capitoline Hill, a building that Josephus undoubtedly saw.<sup>36</sup> Literary sources do suggest that the homes of the wealthy were sometimes covered with gold. First among these was Nero himself, whose villa on the Roman Palatine was called the Domus Aurea or “Golden House” owing to the extensive—and to ancient authors excessive—quantities of gold with which the plaster

<sup>32</sup> Ant. 15.395; Tacitus, *History*, 5.5; m. Middot 3:8. See the comments of Joseph Patrich, “The Golden Vine, the Sanctuary Portal, and its Depiction on the Bar-Kokhba Coins,” *Jewish Art* 19/20 (1993–1994): 56–61.

<sup>33</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 105–106.

<sup>34</sup> t. Sotah 15:12; t. Baba Batra 2:17 (= b. Baba Batra 50b).

<sup>35</sup> Stephan Zink with Heinrich Piening, “Haec Aurea Templa: The Palatine Temple of Apollo and its Polychromy,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 22 (2009): 109–122, at 122.

<sup>36</sup> R. H. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels: Latomus, 1996), 105–110; Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 1, 92, 96.

of the walls and vaults were overlaid.<sup>37</sup> Suetonius (d. ca. 122 CE) remarks that “parts of the house were overlaid with gold and studded with precious stones and mother of pearl” (in ceteris partibus cuncta aulolita, distincta gemmis unionumque conchis erant).<sup>38</sup> In fact, the “Gilded Vault” of the Domus Aurea has recently been examined by an international team and its lavish polychromy—which originally included copious amounts of gold—recovered.<sup>39</sup> Lucan (d. 65 CE) reports that Cleopatra’s palace had a ceiling covered with a thick layer of gold (. . . crassumque trabes absconderat aurum).<sup>40</sup> Mark Bradley comments that by implication this and other luxuries of Cleopatra’s palace mentioned by Lucan were “not unfamiliar features of Neronian Rome.”<sup>41</sup> Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) reports rather negatively that during the late first century the *nouveau riche* of Rome gilded their roofs and painted the walls of their homes with gold paint.<sup>42</sup> The technology described in our tradition parallels Roman masonry construction, as does Pliny’s negative evaluation of those who indulge in gold ostentation in architecture.

This interpretation assumes that technology well established in the Roman world stands behind our text. What of the Sasanian world in which Rav Hīsda, his son-in-law Rabba (or, as some manuscripts suggest, Rava) flourished? All of these lived in Meḥoza, near Ctesephon,<sup>43</sup> and Abbaye resided in Pumpedita. Does this text relate to distinctly Sasanian architectural traditions? The facades of the great palaces of Shapur II and his successors at Ctesiphon—the most important and luxurious buildings in their world—were covered with cast stucco tiles set in regular patterns. This regularity would certainly give the sense of “courses.”

<sup>37</sup> Catia Clementi, Valeria Ciocan, Manuela Vagnini, Brenda Doherty, Marisa Laurenzi Tabasso, Cinzia Conti, Brunetto Giovanni Brunetti, and Costanza Miliani, “Non-Invasive and Micro-Destructive Investigation of the *Domus Aurea* Wall Painting Decorations,” *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* 401, no. 4 (2011):1815–1826.

<sup>38</sup> Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, ed. M. Ihm (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908), *Nero* 31.2, Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0061%3Alife%3Dnero>.

<sup>39</sup> Catia Clementi, Valeria Ciocan, Manuela Vagnini, Brenda Doherty, Marisa Laurenzi Tabasso, Cinzia Conti, Brunetto Giovanni Brunetti, and Costanza Miliani, “Non-Invasive and Micro-Destructive Investigation of the *Domus Aurea* Wall Painting Decorations,” *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* 401, no. 6 (2011): 1815–1826.

<sup>40</sup> Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ed. C. H. Weise (Leipzig: G. Bassus, 1835), 10.113, Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0133>.

<sup>41</sup> Bradley, *Color and Meaning*, 219.

<sup>42</sup> *Natural History* 33.18.

<sup>43</sup> See Elman, “Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages,” 189–192.



Generally geometric and richly patterned, the background color of these deeply polychromatic tiles was often blue. At Ctesephon, for example, stucco was decorated with “representations of figures in brilliant colors, such as blue, pink, yellow, brown, tan, yellow-green and red, outlined in black.” While not “marble” per se, these glazed tiles would well appear to be bright stone, thus conveying a visual effect close to colored marble and perhaps gold.<sup>44</sup> Most significantly, Edith Porada notes that “Other indications of the rich ornamentation of the palace came from the German excavations,<sup>45</sup> which yielded from the entire palace area mosaic glass cubes, many of them covered with gold. These point to the presence of mosaics on the upper part of the walls, perhaps even in the barrel-vaults, whereas the lower walls appear to have been covered with slabs of multi-coloured marble, of which fragments were found.”<sup>46</sup> While our knowledge of Sasanian architecture is far less rich than that of ancient Roman architecture, even this small amount is sufficient to begin to contextualize our traditions within the Sasanian environment. Technology well known from Roman and Byzantine contexts was used to decorate the Sasanian palace and its legendary throne room, and rabbis could well have been aware of this. This is not surprising, as Shapur I is known to have resettled Christian artisans from defeated Roman cities to build royal projects.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the wave-like pattern of the Temple masonry—whatever the material—described in line 11 as “the waves of the sea,” has been rightly associated by Grossmark with a tradition in b. Ḥagigah 14b. This text relates instructions given by Rabbi Aqiva to his colleagues for mystical praxis for those “entering the garden” and expounding the “dangerous and

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<sup>44</sup> M. S. Dimond, “The Second Expedition to Ctesephon (1931–2), English Summary,” 34. See Jens Kröger, *Sasanidischer Stuckdekor* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1982).

<sup>45</sup> Oscar Reuther, *Die Ausgrabungen der deutschen Ktesiphon-Expedition im Winter 1928/1929* (Berlin: Islamische Kunstabteilung der Staatlichen Museen, 1930).

<sup>46</sup> Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 205; online: “The Art of Sassanians,” Iran Chamber Society, [http://www.iran-chamber.com/art/articles/art\\_of\\_sassanians.php](http://www.iran-chamber.com/art/articles/art_of_sassanians.php). See Michael Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present: Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 261.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Morony, “Population Transfers between Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine Empire,” in *La Persia e Bisanzio. Atti dei convegni i lincei* 201 (2004): 161–179; Karin Mosig-Walburg, “Deportationen römischer Christen in das Sasanidenreich durch Shapur I. und Folgen—Eine Neubewertung,” *Klio* 92, no. 1 (2010): 117–156; Christelle Jullien, “Les chrétiens déportés dans l’empire sassanide sous Šābūr Ier: À propos d’un récent article,” *Studia Iranica* 40 (2011): 285–293.



mystical discourse on the *Merkavah* [the divine chariot of Ezekiel 1].”<sup>48</sup> The tradition relates that “when you draw near the stones of pure *shayish*, do not say water, water.” It then tells that the second-century sage “Ben Azzai looked and died,” and that “Ben Zoma looked and was smitten.” Only Rabbi Aqiva, the hero of this text, can discern that the stone is not water and survive. As in our tradition, Hagigah associates *shayish* with water. While in Sukkah/Baba Batra this experience is favorable, in Hagigah it is dislocatingly dangerous—even fatal for one ascending toward the divine presence. No such association between *shayish* and the sight of stone as water appears in classical Palestinian sources. It appears only in the Babylonian Talmud, though the Hagigah passage does claim Palestinian origin.<sup>49</sup> Hekhalot mystical texts—difficult to date or even to locate in one empire or the other, but manifesting characteristics of both centers and dating to the sixth/seventh–ninth century or so—<sup>50</sup> expand upon the Hagigah text. In the most elaborate tradition, we read:<sup>51</sup>

בן עזאי הציץ בהיכל ששי  
 ופתח פיו  
 וראה זיו אור אבני שש שיהיו סל(ו)לות בהיכל.  
 ולא סבל גופו  
 ושאלים: מים הללו מה טיבן ומת.  
 בן זומא הציץ בזיו באבני השיש  
 וסבר השיש מים.  
 סבל גופו שלא שאלם אבל לא סבל דעתו ונפגע.  
 יצא מדעתו.

Ben Azzai looked at the sixth temple  
 and saw the ethereal splendor of the *shayish* stones with which the temple  
 was paved.

<sup>48</sup> This is Michael D. Swartz’s genial language. See Swartz, “Mystical Texts,” *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part*, ed. S. Safrai, Z. Safrai, J. Schwartz, and P. H. Tomson (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 396–403, esp. 400. The literature on this text is immense; in addition to that cited by Swartz, see David J. Halperin’s measured discussion in *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980), and the bibliography there, esp. 86–89. In addition, see Vita Daphna Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 35–37, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Grossmark, “‘Shayish,’” 277.

<sup>50</sup> Some date these texts as early as the third century; see Swartz, “Mystical Texts,” 403.

<sup>51</sup> *Hekhalot zutarti*, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, ms. N8218 (828), as transcribed by Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981), §345. My translation is informed by that of Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 8.

His body did not suffer.  
 And he opened his mouth, and asked them [apparently the heavenly angels]:  
 "What kind of waters are these?"  
 And he died.

Ben Zoma looked at the splendor of the *shayish* stones  
 and he took them for water.  
 And his body could bear it not to ask them, but his mind could not bear it,  
 and he was struck  
 and he went out of his mind.  
 And he opened his mouth, and asked them [apparently the heavenly angels]:  
 "What kind of waters are these?"  
 And he died.

Comparison of marble with the "waves of the sea" is well established in classical literature. Roman, Byzantine, and then Islamic authors refer to the sense of undulation produced by staring at marble facing and flooring, which for them was akin to the waves of the sea.<sup>52</sup> More than that, as early as Hellenistic Athens, Greco-Roman science held that marble was solidified water.<sup>53</sup> The facade of the Temple appears to undulate like the waves of the sea, the Sukkah/Baba Batra text imaging a situation where the three colors of the stone facade are perceived as moving.<sup>54</sup> Taking our tradition in b. Baba Batra perhaps a bit farther than I probably ought, I wonder if the undulation of the Temple facade is a fitting capstone to a *sugya* in which rabbis themselves undulate in their relationship with Herod—who starts out as a killer of sages but becomes a follower of the rabbis, redeemed by building a glorious temple, forgiven somehow owing to the complexity of Herod's undulating client relationship with Rome.

To sum up: Krauss and Grossmark were completely justified in writing that the tradition of a multicolored Temple in Sukkah 51b and Baba Batra 4b does not reflect the actual Herodian Temple facade. This tradition responds to the claim of the Temple's overriding "beauty," imaging the most beautiful public building the Amoraim could muster based upon construction techniques known from both the Roman and Sasanian empires. In this essay, I have suggested the sorts of visual culture that stand behind this text—knowledge that was "obvious" to the ancient

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<sup>52</sup> See Barry Fabio, "Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 4 (2007): 627–656, esp. 637–638.

<sup>53</sup> Fabio, "Walking on Water," 630–631.

<sup>54</sup> In such a case, brain might not fully fuse the images seen by each eye into a single image. This interpretation is based upon my own first-hand experience, owing to my own rather complex experience of strabismus.

authors, but that we can only know through a deep comparative reading of literary and archaeological sources.<sup>55</sup> Our tradition thus stands at the visual cusp of empires. It makes the tacit case for the Temple's greatness in terms of the technology used for the most important buildings of Rome and Persia. With a "snark" that the rabbis might well have appreciated in Josephus himself, our tradition claims that the Jerusalem temple could have shined even more brightly than it did—except that the rabbis curbed Herod's extravagance!

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<sup>55</sup> "Archaeology and the Interpretation of Midrash," in *How Should Late Antique Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World? Hermeneutical Limits and Possibilities*, ed. M. Kraus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 199–217; and Daniel Sperber, "The Use of Archaeology in Understanding Rabbinic Materials: A Talmudic Perspective" in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 14.

## CHAPTER SIX

### JEWISH IDENTITY AT THE CUSP OF EMPIRES: THE JEWS OF DURA EUROPOS BETWEEN ROME AND PERSIA

Jewish identity in the Greco-Roman world has been a subject of sustained concern in recent years. The question of “Who was a Jew?” has interested both historians working within the traditions of Judaic studies who struggle in the present to define their own communal identities, and historians of early Christianity attempting to understand the composition of the “New Israel”—both in antiquity and in the present.<sup>1</sup> Scholars of classical art have also entered the discussion, often bringing their own complex ancient-modern identity issues to the table.<sup>2</sup> The synagogue that is the subject of this chapter bears particular resonance for me, I having grown up in a then-small, quad-lingual (really English, with some Yiddish, Hebrew, and a bit of Spanish) Jewish community in San Diego of the 1970s, minutes from the Mexican border and 130 miles from the nearest kosher restaurant. The synagogue of Dura Europos, an ancient city overlooking the Euphrates River in current eastern Syria—then on the hostile border between Rome and Sasanian Persia—is an excellent locus within which to investigate the nature of Jewish identity in the third century CE. The Dura Europos synagogue presents evidence for the complicated

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<sup>1</sup> This question forms the title of Lawrence H. Schiffman's study *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985). The literature focusing on this area is now vast. Recent studies include Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 271–281, and my discussion of Elsner's approach in Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 51–52; John Pollini, “Gods and Emperors in the East: Images of Power and the Power of Intolerance,” in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near East: Reflections on Culture, Ideology, and Power*, ed. Y. Z. Eliav, E. A. Friedland, and S. Herbert (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 165–195. Pollini borrows the 1950s ecumenical terminology of a “Judaeo-Christian heritage” to flatten Jewish and Christian attitudes, by and by conflating the responses of the colonized Judeans and those of the imperial Romans and the supercessionist Christian empire. See also Annabel J. Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem, and Ravenna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15–21; Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 127–156; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 5–59, 131–132, 174–185.

“hybrid” identity of a small Jewish community on the liminal borderline (*limes* in Latin)<sup>3</sup> where the Roman and Sasanian Persian empires—and peoples—met, mingled, and around 256, fought a bitter battle.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the Persians conquered Dura, and this Roman border city, deemed by some today a “crossroads of antiquity” (as it was called in a recent exhibition) was abandoned—the only reason that this synagogue is preserved for us today.<sup>5</sup>

The discovery in 1932 of this illustrated synagogue, an estimated 60 percent of its paintings intact (Figures 25a–c), was immediately recognized to be a sensation, and nothing like it has been uncovered since. Together with the well-known wall paintings depicting biblical scenes through the lens of late antique Jewish biblical interpretation (*midrash*), an amazing array of Aramaic, Greek, Middle Persian, and Parthian inscriptions were discovered written on the paintings and extant ceiling tiles of the synagogue, and two fragments of a Hebrew liturgical parchment that likely originated in the synagogue were uncovered on an adjacent street (Figure 26).

To the best of my knowledge, this is by far the largest number of languages yet discovered within a single monument of this modest size, and for that alone, the Dura synagogue is noteworthy. Art historians, archaeologists, religion scholars, social historians, classicists, and Talmudists have interpreted the discoveries from the perspectives of their various disciplines.<sup>6</sup> Little has been written, however, that attempts to integrate the various linguistic and visual remains of the Dura synagogue as the religious meeting place of a unique and intensely multilingual community. In this chapter I return to the primary sources for the synagogue during its second phase (244/5–ca. 256 CE), with particular emphasis upon the epigraphic evidence. My sights are set on the multilingual community at

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<sup>3</sup> *Limes* is, of course, the source of the neologism *liminal*, applied most famously to issues of human geography by Victor Turner. See Turner and Turner, *Image and Imagination*.

<sup>4</sup> Simon James, “Dura-Europos and the Chronology of Syria in the 250s AD,” *Chiron* 5 (1985), 111–124; eadem, “Dark Secrets of the Archive: Evidence for ‘Chemical Warfare’ and Martial Convergences in the Siege-Mines of Dura-Europos,” *Dura Europos: Crossroads of Antiquity*, ed. L. R. Brody and G. L. Hoffman (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMicken Museum of Art, Boston College, 2011), 295–317.

<sup>5</sup> See pp. 14–15.

<sup>6</sup> Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, is a supremely balanced presentation, though Kraeling’s lack of specialized knowledge of ancient Jewish literature is sometimes evident. This is remedied by Eleazar L. Sukenik, *The Synagogue of Dura-Europos and Its Frescoes* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1947).



Figure 25a.



Figure 25b.





Figure 25c.

Figures 25a–c. Model of the Dura Europos synagogue, 1972 (courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum).





Figure 26. Hebrew liturgical parchment, found near the Dura Europos synagogue (courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

Dura Europos that created the wall paintings, the 125 extant inscriptions,<sup>7</sup> and the liturgical parchment, leaving behind a precious conduit through which we may “listen in” and perhaps imagine some of the ways that Aramaic, Greek, and Persian speakers—Jews from east and west and perhaps non-Jews—experienced, imagined, and constructed Judaism in a house near the city wall converted into a magnificent synagogue. I will draw upon the larger contexts of Jewish literary and archaeological remains from late antiquity in this exposition of the Dura Europos synagogue, and conclude with some remarks on its place within the larger frame of Jewish culture during the third century.

<sup>7</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 139–212, conveniently assembles the somewhat dispersed scholarly discussions on the synagogue inscriptions. In addition to the 125 inscriptions from the second phase of the synagogue, David Noy and H. Bloedhorn (*IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 134–139) note three inscriptions from the first phase, which ended with the refurbishment that took place in 244/45. See now Karen B. Stern, “Tagging Sacred Space in the Dura-Europos Synagogue,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 25 (2012): 172–193, which profitably compares graffiti in the synagogue to other structures at Dura.

The Greek and Aramaic inscriptions of the Dura synagogue fall into two groups: dedicatory inscriptions and short labels that identify characters in the various scenes. There is no consistency in labeling—neither linguistically, nor regarding which scenes are labeled and which are not. This lack of methodical labeling has caused great consternation to modern scholars, allowing for all manner of learned (and sometimes learnedly quirky) interpretation. Thus, for example, the four so-called wing panels above the Torah shrine, which contain unlabeled images of four men, are heavily discussed. The panels have received all manner of identifications,<sup>8</sup> including Moses and Abraham (likely),<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah and Ezra (less likely, at least to my mind),<sup>10</sup> and Rabban Gamaliel II proclaiming the lunar calendar (unlikely).<sup>11</sup> Some—like “The Ark in the Land of the Philistines,” as Carl H. Kraeling called it (WB 4)—are little disputed even without labels. Others are heavily labeled. Aramaic inscriptions reading “Moses when he went up from Egypt and split the sea,” “Moses when he split the sea,” “Moses son of Levi,” and a lost inscription of which only the name Moses is preserved appear in a single panel that without question illustrates just that event (WA 3, Figure 27).<sup>12</sup>

This panel is in the upper register of the synagogue paintings, so the glossator did not write it there casually. Someone wanted to make very sure to hyper-identify the hero of the story—who appears three times in this composition—as Moses. Was the glossator discomfited by the comic book-like narrative effect of Moses appearing three times, or was this multiplication taken as an opportunity for an act of pious labeling directed toward readers of Jewish Aramaic? We cannot know, but it is noteworthy that baby Moses, who appears two times in the lowest register (WC 1) and was thus accessible to even a short glossator, is unlabeled.

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<sup>8</sup> For a handy list of scholarly identifications of the images of the Dura synagogue, see Joseph Gutmann, “Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römische Welt*, ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini, pt. 2 (Berlin: Walther de Gruyter, 1984), 21.2:1313–33; eadem, “The Synagogue of Dura Europos: A Critical Analysis,” in *Evolution of the Synagogue: Problems and Progress*, ed. H. C. Kee and L. H. Cohick (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 73–88.

<sup>9</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 181.

<sup>10</sup> On Ezra, see Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 234; on Jeremiah, see Herbert Kessler, “Prophetic Portraits in the Dura Synagogue,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 30 (1987): 152–155; Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescos of the Dura Synagogue* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 130–132.

<sup>11</sup> Luc Dequeker, “Le zodiaque de la synagogue de Beth Alpha et la Midrash,” *Bijdragen, tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 47 (1986): 26.

<sup>12</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 162–166.



Figure 27. “Moses when he went up from Egypt and split the sea,” Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Fred Andereg, after E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* [New York: Pantheon, 1964], II, pl. XIV).

Significantly, “Moses when he went up from Egypt and split the sea” parallels Jewish Aramaic biblical paraphrases, *targumim* from both Babylonia and Palestine of roughly the same period, and so is confluent with that literary tradition.<sup>13</sup> The majority of Aramaic inscriptions at Dura are from the synagogue, and this “Jewish” square script appears only in the synagogue inscriptions, in the Hebrew liturgical text, and in a Jewish marriage contract discovered at Dura.<sup>14</sup> The Aramaic inscriptions—unlike the Greek and Persian wall and ceiling tile inscriptions—were written in a script that was identifiably “Jewish” and apparently conveyed Jewishness to the community and perhaps to Aramaic-speaking non-Jews as well. If the goal had been cross-cultural communication, Palmyrene might have been a far more useful Semitic language/script. This suggests the centrality of Jewish Aramaic within a Jewish community that drew from Greek, Aramaic, and Persian speakers, Jews from both sides of the Roman/Persian divide.

This diversity is expressed most succinctly in the two almost identical Aramaic donor lists that appear on two preserved ceiling tiles. Tile “A,” completed based upon the nearly identical tile “B,” begins (Figure 28):<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 182.

<sup>14</sup> J. T. Milik, “Parchemin judéo-araméen de Doura-Europos an 200 ap. J.-C.,” *Syria* 45, nos. 1–2 (1968): 97–104; C. Bradford Welles et al., *The Parchments and Papyri: The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report V, Part I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 75; Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Nabatean Documentary Texts from the Judaean Desert and Related Material* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2000), 1:187.

<sup>15</sup> Following the reading of Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 26–31, and my translation in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, ed. S. Fine (New York: Yeshiva University Museum and Oxford University Press, 1996), 162, which corresponds to



Figure 28. Ceiling tile “B,” with a dedicatory inscription in Aramaic, Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Steven Fine).

הדין ביתי אתבני  
 בשנת חמש מאה חמשין  
 ושית דאנין שנת תרתן לפליפוס  
 קסר בקשיותה דשמואל  
 כהנה בר יד[ע]י ארכונ דקמו  
 על עיביתה הדי אברס גזיב  
 רה ושמואל [בר ס]פרה ו[ארשך]  
 גיורה...

This house was built in the year five hundred fifty  
 and six, which is the second year of Philip  
 ... Caesar in the eldership of Samuel  
 the priest son of Yed[a']ya the archon. [Those who] stood (as patrons)  
 of this work were: Abram the treasurer  
 Samuel [son of S]afra and [Arshakh]  
 the proselyte...

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my own investigation of the inscriptions both at the Yale University Museum and of tile “A” while on exhibition in *Sacred Realm* in 1996. See *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 139–146.

This inscription includes Jews with biblical names (Samuel—two times—and Abram), a naming practice common in both Jewish communities of the Roman Empire (including Palestinian and diaspora communities) and those of the Sasanian Persian Empire (that is, Talmudic “Babylonia”). All these donors appear in Greek dedicatory inscriptions as well (Figure 29).

The most significant donor, Samuel the priest and *archon*, is called in a Greek text “presbyter of the Jews.”<sup>16</sup> The name Safra, literally “scribe,” was used in Jewish and other Aramaic dialects in both empires,<sup>17</sup> and Arshakh, a Persian name, seems likely to have been a Persian speaker—or at least the child of Persian speakers. A Greek ceiling tile memorializes the donations by Abram and Arsaces—presumably the same Abram and Arshakh as in our Aramaic dedicatory inscription, together with one Solomon and a man with the Greek name Silas.<sup>18</sup> This suggests perhaps the priority of Aramaic and Greek as the main spoken languages of the benefactors of the synagogue, even as at least one Persian—and maybe two—was counted among the benefactors to the congregation.

Significantly, none of the biblical scenes is labeled in Hebrew; inscriptions appear only in Greek and, more commonly, Aramaic. This is very different from later Palestinian images, in which Hebrew, “the language of the holy house,”<sup>19</sup> was used to label biblical scenes in the fifth- to sixth-century Palestinian synagogues at Sepphoris, Gaza, Na’aran, and Beth Alpha.<sup>20</sup> The use of Aramaic at Dura reflects broader trends in Jewish

<sup>16</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 146–150. *Archon*, “leader,” is a Greek loan word that was taken over into Palestinian Jewish Aramaic and spelled with an *aleph* (as in our inscription), while in extant evidence for Babylonian Jewish Aramaic it appears rarely, and with an *ayin*. See Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic*, (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 881–882.

<sup>17</sup> Albeck, *Introduction*, 302.

<sup>18</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 51–52. A group of ceiling tiles bears the inscribed Persian name Orbaz transliterated into Greek. Scholars are divided as to whether Orbaz is the name of a place or the manufacturer’s mark. Similar signed tiles were found elsewhere at Dura. See Lea Roth-Gerson, *The Jews of Syria as Reflected in the Greek Inscriptions* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 88–89. *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 209–10: “There is no compelling reason to suppose that the bearer of the name was Jewish. It is unlikely that [the] tiles were made specifically for the synagogue.”

<sup>19</sup> Avigdor Shinan, “*Lishon Beit Kudsha* in the Aramaic Targumim to the Pentateuch” [Hebrew], *Beth Mikra* 3, no. 66 (1976): 472–474; eadem, “The Aramaic Targum as a Mirror of Galilean Jewry,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 248–250; eadem, *The Embroidered Targum*, 113–114; Fine, *This Holy Place*, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Sepphoris: Ze’ev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Context* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2005), 199–202; Beth Alpha, Gaza, Na’aran: Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 75–76, 91, 97;





Figure 29. Ceiling tile with a dedicatory inscription in Greek, Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Steven Fine).

culture in both empires, in which Aramaic translation/paraphrase—*Targum*—was significant as a mediator between the Hebrew Bible and Aramaic-speaking communities. Aramaic translations of Scripture are known from as early as the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>21</sup> and the translation of Scripture into Aramaic and Greek is well attested in late antique Jewish sources, facilitating comprehension of the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Pentateuch, by communities that spoke these languages.<sup>22</sup> The lack of Hebrew, by that time a literary language almost everywhere, in the wall

and Meroth: Joseph Naveh, "The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues" [Hebrew], *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1989): 304–306.

<sup>21</sup> Uwe Glessmer, "Targumim," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:915–918.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Perrot, "The Reading of the Bible in the Ancient Synagogue," and Phillip S. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling (Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1990), 137–188, 217–254.



Figure 30. Aaron before the tabernacle, Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Fred Andereg, after Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, II, pl. X).

inscriptions does not mitigate the possibility that Scripture and prayer might have been recited, at least in part, in the “holy language.”<sup>23</sup> Suggestively, the fragments of the Hebrew liturgical text show clear parallels to rabbinic liturgical formulae (Figure 26).<sup>24</sup> Thus, four languages are known to have been used simultaneously in the small Durene Jewish community: Greek, Aramaic, Persian, and Hebrew.

Aaron before the biblical Tabernacle on the western wall of the Dura synagogue (WB 2) is identified as “Aaron” in Greek (Figure 30)—one of only three Greek image labels, none of which is more than one word in length.<sup>25</sup> This is in stark contrast to the longer phrases that appear in

<sup>23</sup> On the status of Hebrew as a spoken language in late antiquity, see Jonas Greenfield, “The Languages of Palestine, 200 BCE–200 CE,” in *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variations*, ed. H. H. Paper (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 143–154. On Hebrew in diaspora synagogues, see Steven Fine, “‘Peace Upon Israel’: Synagogues in Spain during Late Antiquity,” *Los judíos españoles según las fuentes hebreas*, ed. J. Holo (Valencia, Spain: Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana, Generalitat Valenciana, Subsecretaria de Promoció Cultural, Museu de Belles Arts de Valencia, 2002), 6–19 (in Spanish and Catalan), 146–50 (in English). On Hebrew as the “holy language,” see Fine, *This Holy Place*, 15–16.

<sup>24</sup> Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 259: “In the fill of Wall Street, however, more precisely in Section W8 behind the neighboring block L8, a piece of parchment was discovered in 1932 which may have some relation to the furnishings of the Synagogue.” See Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 172–183.

<sup>25</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 168–169.



Aramaic and particularly Persian inscriptions. The presence of Greek dedicatory inscriptions within synagogue contexts was not in the least unusual in Palestinian and Mediterranean diaspora communities during late antiquity, and in the Gerasa synagogue (in modern Jordan) a biblical scene is similarly labeled in Greek.<sup>26</sup> Is it significant that Aaron, who appears as a standard eastern Roman priest sacrificing before a temple, is labeled in Greek?<sup>27</sup> Does this conscious labeling suggest an attempt to distance the biblical high priest from similarly portrayed “pagan” liturgical officiates—as, for example, the image of Konon son of Nikostratos in the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods<sup>28</sup>—in a language that Greek gentiles could understand? I could also imagine the opposite and attempt to show that the biblical priests were not so different from everyone else’s priests, but this approach strikes me as too apologetically modern.

Samuel anointing David appears in the bottom register (Figure 31) to the right of the Torah shrine (WC 4). This scene is labeled in Aramaic, “Samuel when he anointed David.”<sup>29</sup> What appears to be a seat for a prominent synagogue leader was located immediately below this image. This would thus circumvent what seems to have been a principled avoidance of placing dedicatory inscriptions within the individual biblical paintings.<sup>30</sup> Some, I among them, have connected this seat with “Samuel the priest and *archon*,” “presbyter of the Jews”—or perhaps with the Samuel mentioned in a second Greek inscription.<sup>31</sup> This would parallel the placement of images of benefactors/communal leaders within the sacred area of the Temple of the Palmyrene Gods and the mithraeum,<sup>32</sup> but with a decidedly Jewish twist. It would draw a clear message of continuity between the biblical heroes and the Jews of Dura, whom the paintings quietly assert wore the same clothes, shared the same hairstyles, reclined on the same kinds of furniture, and most importantly, read scrolls publicly and shared the same names.

<sup>26</sup> For Palestine, see Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions*, 46–50.

<sup>27</sup> The only other Figure labeled in Greek is Solomon (*IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 167).

<sup>28</sup> See most recently Lucinda Dirven, “Religious Competition and the Decoration of Sanctuaries: The Case of Dura-Europos,” *Eastern Christian Art* 1 (2004): 1–19, and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>29</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 166.

<sup>31</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 150–151.

<sup>32</sup> See Dirven, “Religious Competition,” 10–11, 14–16.



Figure 31. “Samuel When He Anointed David,” Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Fred Andereg, after Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, II, pl. VII).

The Persian inscriptions are of particular interest, as they are far less formal than the Greek and Aramaic texts.<sup>33</sup> These graffiti appear only on the lowest register of the wall paintings and can be reached while still standing on the floor and benches of the synagogue. Added sometime after the completion of the paintings, they represent the responses of early viewers of the synagogue, sometime between 244/5 and about 256 CE. Six inscriptions record the visits of Persian speakers to the synagogue, using similar formulae.<sup>34</sup> All these appear on the “Mordecai and Esther” panel (WC 2), depicting episodes from the biblical book of Esther, a theme that would doubtless be meaningful for Persian-speaking Jews (Figures 32 and 33).<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 176–209. The poor state of preservation of the Persian inscriptions makes them notoriously difficult to interpret.

<sup>34</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 181–196.

<sup>35</sup> Ancient Jewish sources are collected by Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941), 4:365–448, 6:450–481. On rabbinic reflection on Esther in Babylonia, see Eliezer Segal, *The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). The Tomb of Esther and Mordecai in Hamadan,



Figure 32. Mordecai and Esther panel, Dura Europos synagogue (photograph by Fred Andereg, after Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, II, pl. VI).

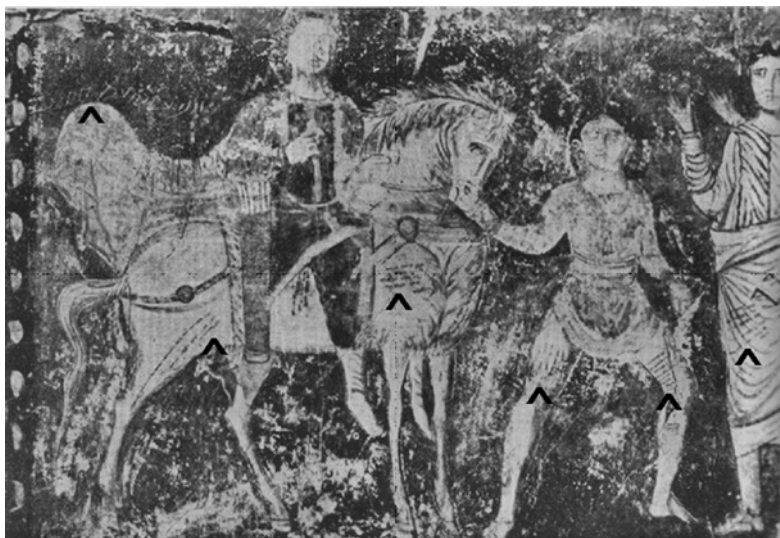


Figure 33. Persian and Aramaic inscriptions, Mordecai and Esther panel, Dura Europos synagogue. ^ denotes Persian-language inscriptions (after A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Hebrew Arts* [New York: Schocken, 1950], 128).

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Iran, appears for the first time in the writings of Benjamin of Tudela, who visited around 1167. While it clearly existed previous to this visit, its origins are unknown. See Amnon Netzer, "The Tombs of Esther and Mordecai in Hamadan, Iran" [Hebrew], in *Israel: Nation and Land* (Tel Aviv: Haaretz Museum, 1984), 1:177–184; eadem, "Hamadan," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., ed. M. Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 8:292–293.

Mordecai, Ahasuerus, and Esther, the heroes of the story, are all labeled in Aramaic.<sup>36</sup> Haman, the villain, is unlabeled—perhaps a kind of *damnatio memoriae*. Mordecai, Ahasuerus, Esther, Haman, and four servants wear distinctly Persian garb and hairstyles.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, the four bystanders are well dressed in Roman costume. One could imagine a similar scene on the streets of this border city, with groups of Greeks viewing passing Persians, and Persians viewing Romans and Greeks, particularly soldiers, as they passed. A visitation inscription appears on the himation of one of the bystanders observing Mordecai's triumphant ride led by Haman:

māh frawardīn abar  
 sāl 15 ud rōz rašn  
 ka yazdāntah[m]-far[r]bay  
 dibīr ī tahn ō  
 ēn xānag <āmad> u-š ēn nigār  
 passandīd  
 The month Frawardin in  
 The year 15 and the day Rasin  
 When Yazdantahm-Farrabay,  
 The scribe of Tahm [or, valiant scribe],  
 [came] to this house, and he  
 Approved [or appreciated] this picture<sup>38</sup>

A graffito on Haman's right leg calls the synagogue "the edifice of the God of Gods of the Jews."<sup>39</sup> Scholars have debated whether Yazdantahm-Farrabay and the others mentioned in the visitation inscriptions were Persian-speaking Jews or perhaps Persian gentiles, whether they came to the synagogue during a supposed Persian invasion of 253 CE or as travelers, and more.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the case, numerous Persian-speaking visitors ("scribes") with Persian names liked the Esther panel—so much so that their esteem for it was inscribed right on the painting. Together with the Persian costume, the graffiti serve to enhance the Persian character of this court scene. The fact that this scene was placed so prominently within the

<sup>36</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 171–172.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard Goldman, "The Dura Synagogue Costumes and Parthian Art," in *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-Evaluation (1932–1972)*, ed. J. Gutmann (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1973), 52–77; and eadem, "Greco-Roman Dress in Syro-Mesopotamia," *The World of Roman Costume*, ed. J. L. Sebesta and L. Bonfante (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 163–181.

<sup>38</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 181–185.

<sup>39</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 187–190.

<sup>40</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 181–185.

synagogue, encompassing the entire lower register to the left of the Torah shrine, suggests its significance to local Jewish self-understanding even before the graffiti were added.<sup>41</sup>

Other inscriptions focus on images illustrating the resurrection of the dead, a central doctrine of the rabbis of both Palestine and Babylonia<sup>42</sup> and of Zoroastrianism.<sup>43</sup> It is no wonder that Persian speakers, whether Jews or Persians, would find these themes of interest. Thus, the images include an illustration of a prophet reviving a dead child, either Elijah reviving the son of the widow of Zarephath, described in 1 Kings 17, or his student Elisha, who behaves similarly in 2 Kings 4 (WC 1). An Aramaic label made sure that the subject was identified as “Elijah” (Figure 34).

We might postulate that this was the original intent of the painters, as this panel is part of a larger Elijah cycle (SC 1–4, WC 1). A Persian inscription was painted over Elijah’s foot:

ka hormonezd dibīr āmād  
u-š ēn <nigār> [ni]gerīd zīwandag  
kydly (?) murd

When Hormezd the scribe came  
And he looked at this [picture]: “Living  
The child (?) (who has been) dead.”<sup>44</sup>

Another inscription reads:

Māh [arwahišt] rōz hormonezd  
Ka ardāw dibīr āmad  
u-š ēn nigār nigerīd u-š  
kydly(?) nigerīd kū zīwag murd  
āmād

The month [Ardwahist?], day Hormezd,  
When Ardaw the scribe came  
And he looked at this picture and  
He looked at the child (?): “Living the dead  
(be)come.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Kraeling (*Synagogue*, 151) overreaches in suggesting a more pointed Emancipating explanation, arguing that “it testified to the recognition by a Persian monarch of rights for which Judaism inside the boundaries of the Roman Empire was still struggling.”

<sup>42</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> See A. V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroastrian Studies: The Iranian Religion and Various Monographs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 143–152.

<sup>44</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 196–198.

<sup>45</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 200–202.





Figure 34. "Elijah Reviving the Son of the Widow of Zarephath," Dura Europos synagogue (Photograph by Fred Andereg, Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 11, pl. VIII).

This is, of course, the point of the image itself. What is interesting here is that the glosses invoke Persian scribes who well understood the message of this image and emphasized Elijah's act of reviving the dead child. The apparent excitement of Hormezd and Ardaw is memorialized and leads other Persian-speaking viewers through the viewing process. Just to make sure that the viewer knew that this scene represented Elijah, and not his student Elisha, an Aramaic gloss had been added sometime earlier that identified Elijah.

Another inscription, this one in Parthian and painted above Elijah's right thigh, waxes theological in emphasizing the broader theme of the resurrection of the dead: "Praise to the gods, praise; since life, life eternally has been given."<sup>46</sup> Owing to the overall contempt for non-Jewish deities in the synagogue paintings—with both Baal and Dagon mocked, not to mention the Palmyrene gods who served as the iconographic models for Dagon<sup>47</sup>—my guess is that "gods" here is the equivalent of *Elohim* in Hebrew, a plural supposed to be the royal "we."<sup>48</sup> It is always

<sup>46</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 199–200.

<sup>47</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> See the comments of Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi) to Gen 1:26 (*Raschi: Der Kommentar des Salomo b. Isaac über der Pentateuch* [Hebrew], ed. A. Berliner; 2nd ed., ed. H. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1969).

possible, though, that a presumably non-Jewish author meant “gods” in the plural! Be that as it may, when grouped with the eyewitness accounts of Persian scribes, this inscription appears to be assertively performative.

If the Persian scribes were non-Jews, what were they doing in the synagogue in the first place? Early interpreters thought that they were military officers who entered during a military incursion in around 253 CE.<sup>49</sup> More recently Simon James has shown, based upon ongoing excavations, that the incursion never happened.<sup>50</sup> While Persian visits to Babylonian synagogues are not recorded in rabbinic literature, the presence of polytheistic and Christian visitors and “God-fearers”—non-Jews who associated with the Jewish community—is well documented in the eastern Roman Empire, including dedicatory inscriptions from diaspora synagogues.<sup>51</sup> Could this explain in part the pride of place given to the visitation texts?

The fact that Arshakh is singled out as a “proselyte” (*geora*) in our inscriptions suggests that Judaism was attractive to some Persians—even to the point of religious conversion. We have seen that Arshakh appears on two dedicatory inscriptions on ceiling tiles in a rather formal Aramaic as “Arshakh the Proselyte,” and once in Greek, without a Jewish caste designation, as “Arsaces.”<sup>52</sup> A number of texts in the Babylonian Talmud reference proselytes in the area of Maḥoza, a suburb of the Sasanian capitol of Ctesiphon, though most of the sources date to the mid-fourth century.<sup>53</sup> Complicating Arshakh’s title, a tradition in the Babylonian Talmud, Qedushin 76b, refers to a situation near the period of the Dura synagogue in which the son of a native Jewish woman and a male proselyte is referred to as a “proselyte” (*geora*). This designation is unusual in rabbinic sources, in which the child of a Jewish mother, whether native or proselyte, generally does not bear this caste distinction. Was Arshakh a proselyte himself, as one might assume, or was he perhaps the descendant of a proselyte, as in Qedushin 76b? This text goes on to suggest that proselytes found entrance to communal leadership positions difficult, at least in talmudic Babylonia. The proselyte of our text is said to have sought a position of religious

<sup>49</sup> See Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *Dura Europos and Its Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), 113; and Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 336–338, esp. n. 75.

<sup>50</sup> See James, “Dura-Europos and the Chronology of Syria.”

<sup>51</sup> Louis H. Feldman, “Proselytes and ‘Sympathizers’ in Light of the New Inscriptions from Aphrodisias,” *Revue des études juives* 147, nos. 3–4 (1989): 265–305.

<sup>52</sup> *Geora*, proselyte, is a standard Jewish Aramaic designation for proselytes during this period. See Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic*, 278–279; eadem, *A Dictionary of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990), 127.

<sup>53</sup> Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era*, 137–148.



authority but was afforded only a lesser administrative position—and this only through the direct intervention of the mid-third-century rabbi from Pumpedita (south of Dura on the Euphrates River), Ada son of Ahavah.<sup>54</sup> Does the prominence of Arshakh at Dura, and his identification as a proselyte in Aramaic but not in Greek, reflect complexities in his status within the community? We cannot know, though Qedushin 76b does indeed complicate the interpretation of this enigmatic proselyte.

The content of the Persian inscriptions is of no help in deciding whether these Persians were Jews or non-Jews, since eschatological interest is a shared concern of both biblical/rabbinic sources and Zoroastrianism. Significantly, Yaakov Elman has pointed out to me that in the Babylonian Talmud, composed in Sasanian Persia between the early third and sixth centuries CE, conversations between rabbis and Persian religious leaders focus almost exclusively upon areas of common theological interest.<sup>55</sup> If our Persians are non-Jews, the same might be said of the fascination with resurrection in the Persian visitation texts.

Inscriptions painted on the image of Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek 37), a prophecy that took place in Babylonia and appears on the northern wall of the synagogue (NC 1), have an even more liturgical feel:

im azd kun kū šād  
baw ud yazdān wāng āšnaw  
ēg drōd-mān abar

This make known: Be joyous  
And hear the gods' voice  
Then well-being [or, peace] will be upon us.<sup>56</sup>

This seems to be an internal conversation by one Jew with another, requesting “well-being [or peace] . . . upon us”—in the first-person plural. Another graffiti painted over the Ezekiel panel has a similarly internal feel:

wasan āyēnd tō šaw ēnyā  
šawēnd mā šaw ēnyā

Many will come, you go otherwise!  
They go [or will go], do not go otherwise!<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Albeck, *Introduction*, 193.

<sup>55</sup> Yaakov Elman, personal communication with the author, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 204–207.

<sup>57</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 207–208.

Enigmatic to be sure, a partial inscription on the north jamb of the main door of the synagogue commands, "Quickly come."<sup>58</sup> The placement of this inscription at the liminal threshold of the synagogue hall may have reminded visitors to approach the synagogue with a sense of purpose, perhaps parallel to rabbinic texts that command those coming to the synagogue not to dawdle.<sup>59</sup>

The "epigraphic habit" among Jews at Dura Europos was quite strong.<sup>60</sup> Aramaic, Greek, Persian, and Hebrew were used and I have discussed some of the more fascinating examples.<sup>61</sup> The Persian visitation mementos found on the Purim panel, whether expressing the sentiments of Jewish or non-Jewish scribes, suggest lively interaction across the imperial *limes*, and the labeling texts reflect a clear theological and perhaps performative interest. Graffiti on the Elijah and Ezekiel panels are deeply theological, serving to mediate, intensify, and in some cases almost ritualize the experience of viewing these panels.

Inscriptions form the earliest layer of interpretation of the Dura Europos synagogue paintings. They are thus a unique and valuable tool for interpreting the early reception of these paintings and their place within the now-lost liturgical life of the community. The Persian, Aramaic, and Greek inscriptions express ways that members of the local Jewish community at Dura—and perhaps others—experienced and projected themselves into the synagogue that were as complex as was the culture of the border trading city where they lived. In fact, this "hybridity" was not unique to the Jewish community of Dura, even if the community's location in a border city makes it so extreme as to be noticeable to modern scholars. This reality is well expressed in the literature preserved from the two empires, most prominently the Palestinian Talmud, completed around 400, and the Babylonian Talmud, finished a century or so later. The territoriality embedded in these titles conceals the deep substructure of intellectual and religious commonality, communication, and travel between the rabbinic centers of Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia that are encoded in these vast bodies of text. The bilingual nature of the two Talmudim is of particular interest. Palestinian rabbinic discussions

<sup>58</sup> *IJO Syria and Cyprus*, 209.

<sup>59</sup> For example, y. Berakhot 5:1 (9a).

<sup>60</sup> A felicitous term developed by Ramsey MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire," *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982): 233–246.

<sup>61</sup> Relevant, though not discussed here, is evidence of iconoclastic behavior in the synagogue; see Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 131–132.

took place in a dialect known today as Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, which is imbued with Greek loanwords and concepts drawn from the Roman context, while Babylonian discussions occurred in the mutually intelligible Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, which contains numerous Persian loanwords and concepts. Rabbis moved back and forth between the “Eastern” and “Western” rabbinic centers, and with them their laws, traditions, and legends. Sources also reflect cultural and political rivalry between the Palestinian and Babylonian communities.<sup>62</sup>

Rabbinic as well as some archaeological sources suggest the deep cultural and literary relationships shared by these communities, even as they were separated by an often hostile international border.<sup>63</sup> The elite literary culture of the rabbis thus provides a significant parallel instance to both the linguistic situation and the knowledge of Jewish legends among Durene Jews.<sup>64</sup>

To conclude: Jewish identity in late antiquity was indeed a complex affair. This has long been known from extant rabbinic sources. The Dura synagogue reflects a similar complexity within a local, non-elite context. The synagogue inscriptions serve as evidence of the ways in which the Jews, as well as perhaps the non-Jews, who functioned within this context and left mementos of their presence on the walls, interacted with their space and with one another. This building—renovated in 244/45, destroyed around 256, discovered in 1932, and continually interpreted ever since—continues to attract interest precisely due to the fascinating “hybrid” community that resonates so clearly with the complicated identities that scholars bring to the work of interpreting its splendid colors, forms, and inscriptions.

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<sup>62</sup> Isaiah Gafni, *Land, Center, and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Of particular interest are a group of silver Aramaic amulets from Palestine and Syria and Aramaic magic bowls from Babylonia that preserve parallel textual traditions and show Jews in both empires responding in closely related yet distinctly local ways. See Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 25, 104–122. Add to this a silver amulet recently deciphered and discussed by my students Eytan Zadoff and Pinchas Roth, “Smamit and Her Children’: An Unpublished Silver Aramaic Amulet,” forthcoming.

<sup>64</sup> Wharton (*Refiguring the Post Classical City*, 48) presaged my interpretative move, rightly arguing for “a coincidence in the intertextualized practice of the midrash [in her case, a passage from *Esther Rabba*] and the synagogue frescoes.” See Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 165–173.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### “EPIGRAPHICAL” STUDY HOUSES IN LATE ANTIQUE PALESTINE: A SECOND LOOK



Figure 35. “This is the study house of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar,” Dabbura, Golan Heights (photograph by Steven Fine).

From Roman antiquity to the present, the *beit ha-midrash*, the “study house” has been the central locus of rabbinic culture.<sup>1</sup> Here rabbis and their followers gathered for all of their communal needs, from study and prayer to court proceedings, business, and in later generations, for a good night’s sleep.<sup>2</sup> Yet the *beit ha-midrash* is a highly elusive institution. Paired with the synagogue in rabbinic sources as “synagogues and study houses,” *batei midrashot* are far less prominent in most forms of rabbinic literature or the archaeological record than the synagogue is (the exception being the Targumim to the Pentateuch).<sup>3</sup> What is true in the extant sources is also the case in modern scholarship. Synagogues have taken pride of place in Jewish social research, in no small part owing to the central role of the synagogue in the transformation of Western Jewry during

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was prepared for a conference on Jewish Culture in the Ancient World, “The *Beit Midrash*: The Emergence and Institutionalization of Jewish Schools of Higher Learning from Second Temple Times to Late Antiquity,” University of Haifa, June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> A very common practice in study houses in Eastern Europe. See Saul Stampfer, “Yeshiva: The Yeshiva after 1800,” *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New York: YIVO, 2010), [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yeshiva/The\\_Yeshiva\\_after\\_1800](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yeshiva/The_Yeshiva_after_1800) (accessed August 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Anthony D. York, “The Targum in the Synagogue and School,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10, no. 1 (1979): 74–86; S. Fine, “‘Their Faces Shine with the Brightness of the Firmament’: Study Houses and Synagogues in the *Targumim* to the Pentateuch,” ed. F. W. Knobloch (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2002), 63–92.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This centrality was expressed not only in scholarship on what Joseph Heinemann and J. J. Petuchowski called “the literature of the synagogue”<sup>4</sup> by Leopold Zunz and his followers in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, often with the intent of transforming contemporary liturgy. It was expressed in the explosion of synagogue construction the world over that began during the mid-nineteenth century and continued through the twentieth (with a break for the Great Depression and World War II). This phenomenon paralleled the search for archaeological and visual roots that began with David Kaufmann’s early writings on Jewish art and the Palestine Exploration Fund’s excavation of ancient synagogues in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> The *beit ha-midrash* simply was not as important as all that, except for the rabbi-centered school of Gedaliah Alon (d. 1950)—who read the Sanhedrin as a kind of semi-autonomous *vaad ha-leumi*, on the model of the Zionist “National Council” that led the Jewish community of British Mandatory Palestine.

Interest in the *beit ha-midrash* developed considerably during the last third of the twentieth century, as the imbalance in our knowledge of the synagogue and the study house became clear, and more importantly, as “synagogue” became a cipher for “nonrabbinic Judaism,” while “study house” came to be equated with “rabbinic” Judaism. Studies of a so-called “rabbinic class” and “rabbinic movement” were the order of the day by a generation of mainly New York-trained Americans who matured during the 1960s and early 70s, seeking a new balance toward the “nonrabbinic Judaism” of American liberal synagogues and away from the world of the yeshiva.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars—some responding to the “linguistic turn” in history writing, and in recent years “Modern Orthodox” Jews such as myself, imagining (and living) a balance that was not quite so stark—began to break down this rather binary category formation, and to seek more complex answers.<sup>7</sup> This approach has been accepted more broadly in recent

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Heinemann and J. J. Petuchowski, *The Literature of the Synagogue* (New York: Behrman House, 1975). See Avigdor Shinan’s survey of this literature, “Synagogues in the Land of Israel: The Literature of the Ancient Synagogue and Synagogue Archaeology,” in Fine, *Sacred Realm*, 130–152.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 5–46.

<sup>6</sup> See Lee I. Levine, “The Sages and the Synagogue in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of the Galilee,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 201–222; Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 226ff., esp. 238–239.

<sup>7</sup> See especially the work of Stuart S. Miller, “The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue,” in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 57–70;

years, as the sway of what I have called the Smith/Goodenough school has receded.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of archaeology, Dan Urman's work on the *beit ha-midrash* has been very significant. Urman's interest began during his participation in a survey of the Golan Heights directed by Shmaryahu Gutman in 1968 of the recently abandoned Syrian town of Dabbura, in the central Golan Heights. Urman's fascination with this artifact continued throughout his career, and resulted in a broad range of studies.<sup>9</sup> He rightly argued that modern scholars had underestimated the study house, perhaps even identifying excavated study houses as synagogues.<sup>10</sup> This is an easy mistake, since these twin places of assembly and study are likely indistinct archaeologically unless inscriptions prove otherwise. In truth, Urman's challenge is somewhat overstated, as rabbis, at least named ones, were few in number,<sup>11</sup> and so communal synagogues must surely have existed in far greater numbers than *batei midrash*. One might also expect that "house *batei midrash*"—parallel to "house churches" and "house synagogues"—unidentifiable architecturally, would have outnumbered archaeologically identifiable study houses (as was likely the case of "house synagogues" as

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eadem, "Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004): 27–76; eadem, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 427–445; eadem, "Real Sages or Nothing More Than Donors and Honored Deceased?—Epigraphical Rabbis Yet Again," in *Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine*, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); Benzion Rosenfeld, "The Title 'Rabbi' in Third- to Seventh-Century Inscriptions in Palestine Revisited," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 61, no. 2 (2010): 234–256.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Hezser, "Correlating Literary, Epigraphic, and Archaeological Sources," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23; Fergus Millar, "Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011): 253–277, esp. 259–262.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Urman wrote nine articles dealing explicitly with Dabbura and this lintel between 1969 and 1985. The most significant of these are cited below. See especially his "Jewish Inscriptions from Dabura in the Golan" *Israel Exploration Journal* 22 (1972): 16–23. For a full listing, and a summary of his final conclusions, see Dan Urman, "Public Structures and Jewish Communities in the Golan Heights," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, ed. D. Urman and P. V. M. Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:427–433, 648–650.

<sup>10</sup> Dan Urman, "The House of Assembly and the House of Study: Are They One and the Same?," in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, ed. D. Urman and P. V. M. Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1:250.

<sup>11</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine* (Jerusalem and New York, 1989), 66–67.



opposed to monumental synagogues).<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, I have taken Urman's challenge seriously, seeking out "study houses" in the archaeological record. I found that numerous "study houses" had been identified by scholars at a number of synagogue sites, generally as a side room suitable for assembly. This identification relies on European models of communal organization where the yeshiva and the synagogue often shared space. Even today a small synagogue, referred to as a "chapel" and as the *beit ha-midrash* (or, more likely than not, as the *beis midrash*) is a feature of many Western synagogues. There is no literary support for this kind of architectural symbiosis between synagogues and study houses in antiquity.

The Dabbura lintel, made of basalt and measuring 170 cm in length and 42 cm tall,<sup>13</sup> was discovered by Gutman over the main doorway of the "modern" mosque, located toward the northern side of the site. It was quickly removed and cleaned, and astonishingly little reference to this original context is made in the scholarly literature. Well known by now, the Dabbura lintel is carved in bas-relief, with a large wreath open above and closed below by a herculean knot, its ends formed as snakes, their heads forming the extremities of the lintel. In the center and on the two sides of the wreath is inscribed, somewhat haphazardly, in a Hebrew phrase in good "Tannaitic" Hebrew, *zeh beit midrasho she-la-Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar*, "This is the study house of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar." Here we have a study hall, or at least a part of one!

There is nothing particularly "Jewish" about the iconography of this lintel—only the inscription identifies it as Jewish. Wreaths similar to this one were standard fare in the Roman world, and among both Jews and Christians in the Levant.<sup>14</sup> I am reminded, for example, of the use of wreaths surrounding menorahs on "chancel" screens from Ashdod (Figure 41), Hammath Gader, and Rehov.<sup>15</sup> The lintels of the nearby Qasrin synagogue

<sup>12</sup> Miller, "The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue," 61–64. On both house churches and house synagogues in diaspora settings, see L. Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), s.v. "wreath."

<sup>15</sup> The menorah on the Ashdod screen does not fit within the wreath, its flames and branches out of sync. On extant screens, see Lihi Habas, "The Bema and Chancel Screen in Synagogues and their Origin," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in*



Figure 36. Meroth synagogue lintel (courtesy of Almoga Ilan).

and at Ramah are significant parallels.<sup>16</sup> The best parallels, however, are lintels from Safed, Yafia, and most importantly a second from Dabbura—now lost—that show birds holding the ends of the wreath. A close parallel to the Eliezer ha-Qappar lintel was discovered at Meroth, where a wreath tied in a herculean knot is again flanked by two eagles.<sup>17</sup> As on our lintel, an inscription in Hebrew appears, this one below: “Blessed are you when you come and blessed are you when you go” (Deut 28:6, Figure 36). The Meroth lintel, the letters colored in ochre paint, stood before a room lined with benches that Zvi Ilan identifies as a *beit midrash*. Perhaps the similarity of the lintels influenced Ilan’s (rather rash) identification of this room as a *beit midrash*.

The recently published wall inscription from the Rehov synagogue is of particular interest in imagining the Dabbura lintel.<sup>18</sup> The inscription is enclosed in a large wreath, painted brightly in earth tones. It is likely that the Dabbura stone was colored, though a cursory investigation at the

*Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 120–124. See below, pp. 148–155, 158.

<sup>16</sup> Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, 202, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Zvi Ilan and I. Damati, *Meroth: The Ancient Jewish Village* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Society for the Preservation of Nature in Israel, 1987), 53–58; Z. Ilan, “The Synagogue and Study House at Meroth,” *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery*, ed. D. Urman and P. V. M. Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1:256–288.

<sup>18</sup> Michal Dayagi-Mendels and Silvia Rozenberg, eds., *Chronicles of the Land: Archaeology in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2011), 159; Fine, “Menorahs in Color: On the Study of Polychromy in Jewish Visual Culture of Roman Antiquity,” 8–17; F. Vitto, “The Interior Decoration of Palestinian Churches and Synagogues,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995): 295. For evidence of wall painting at Rehov and in other Palestinian synagogues, see *ibid.*, 294–297.

Golan Museum did not reveal any obvious signs. A photograph taken at the time of its discovery shows that the center of the lintel was covered in white plaster. Evidence of polychromy was likely removed with that plaster. Evidence of polychromy has been found on other Golan basalts, including the mane of the lion and other areas of the en-Samsam Torah ark base. Nothing is sure about the original context in which the Dabbura lintel was used, as no excavation has been carried out in Dabbura. The reuse of identifiably Jewish artifacts as decorative features by later inhabitants of the Golan was very common, Dabbura included, with no apparent concern for explicitly Jewish iconography until recent times. The best examples were in the village of Naveh (Nawa) in Syria, visited by Leo A. Mayer and Adolph Reifenberg in the 1930s,<sup>19</sup> though closer by important elements of a synagogue were reused in the mosque at Kanaf. If we are to look for the remains of a study house, excavating Dabbura is the place to start.

A number of well-dressed basalt ashlar were discovered in Dabbura, suggesting the existence of at least one public building on this large site.<sup>20</sup> An inscription on a very large architrave commemorates a donation by one Eleazar, who Naveh suggests was named *Eleazar bar [...r]aba*, "Eleazar son of... the great" (or, elder).<sup>21</sup> It is hard to know what to do with this, since Eleazar (and its derivatives) appear eight times in Joseph Naveh's corpus, outnumbered only by Yose (10) and Yehuda (14).<sup>22</sup> Alas, the break in the stones is such that it is not possible to know the length of Eleazar's father's name, but I cannot help wondering whether, as Urman asserted, Eliezer and Eleazar were related.<sup>23</sup> Below the inscription of *Eleazar bar [...r]aba* is a Greek text that mentions one Roustikos.<sup>24</sup> Other inscriptions read "son of Yuda," and another yields the word *berkhata*, "blessing...": "...made the house... may he have a blessing, and [so and so] made the arch."<sup>25</sup> This is the only trilingual collection of inscriptions from Palestinian synagogues, throwing into relief the fact that donors appear in Aramaic and Greek, while the marker of the study house is in Hebrew.

<sup>19</sup> Leo A. Mayer and Adolph Reifenberg, "The Jewish Buildings at Nawe" [Hebrew], *Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* 4 (1936): 1–8.

<sup>20</sup> Urman, "Public Structures," 433.

<sup>21</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 26–27.

<sup>22</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Dan Urman even thinks that they were both "rabbis." See his "Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar and Bar Qappara—Father and Son?" [Hebrew], *Beer-Sheva* 2 (1985): 7–25.

<sup>24</sup> Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions*, 51–52.

<sup>25</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 27–29.

Hebrew seldom appears in Jewish epigraphy of this period, and nowhere else in the Golan. It appears on only two—nearly identical—dedicatory inscriptions in Galilee, from the "small synagogue" at Kefar Baram, and at nearby Alma. At Baram we read: "May there be peace in this place, and in all the places of Israel. Yose ha-Levi son of Levi made this lintel, may blessing come upon his deeds, Amen."<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, Hebrew appears only in literary contexts and not in inscriptions in Galilean synagogues, as labels on mosaics (e.g., *tequfat Nisan* in zodiac mosaics) and in the Rehov agricultural law inscriptions. Significantly, the inscription on the Meroth lintel, a Hebrew citation from Deuteronomy 28:6, "Blessed are you when you come, blessed are you when you go," fits well with Christian use of verses in the architecture of this region. Biblical verses, together with Christian symbols, commonly adorn door and window lintels in nearby Syria.<sup>27</sup> My sense is that the Hebrew on the lintels of Baram, Meroth, and Dabbura is intended to mark off the building in a way that Jews would sense as special (especially as Hebrew was referred to as *lishon beit qudsha* in Targumic literature, the "language of the holy house," referring, at least in part, to the synagogues and study houses).<sup>28</sup> Placed prominently on the lintel in the trilingual village of Dabbura, "study house" in Hebrew is used to assert the significance of the "study house of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar."

*Beit midrasho shel Rabbi X*, "the study house of Rabbi so and so," is, of course, a very common designation in rabbinic sources, where we hear of the schools of numerous scholars, including among them Rabbi Johanan b. Zakkai (y. Megillah 3:1, 73d).<sup>29</sup> The title, name, and frame of this inscription are so wholly rabbinic as to startle; the closest epigraphic examples are the plaster and mosaic inscriptions of the Rehov synagogue.<sup>30</sup> Scholars immediately identified Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar of our inscription with the fifth-generation Tanna of the same name from the Lod region.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19–23.

<sup>27</sup> Howard Crosby Butler, "Report of an American Archaeological Expedition in Syria, 1899–1900," *American Journal of Archaeology* 4, no. 4 (1900): 432–433.

<sup>28</sup> Avigdor Shinan, "*Lishon Beit Kudsha* in the Aramaic Targumim to the Pentateuch"; eadem, "The Aramaic Targum as a Mirror of Galilean Jewry"; eadem, *The Embroidered Targum*.

<sup>29</sup> Urman, "The House of Assembly," 246–248; Fine, "Their Faces Shine with the Brightness of the Firmament," 73.

<sup>30</sup> Fanny Vitto, "The Synagogue at Rehov," *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 90–94; Jacob Sussman, "A Halakhic Inscription from the Beth-Shean Valley" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 43 (1973–1974): 88–158; 44 (1974–1975): 193–195.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Urman, "The Lintel of the School (Beth-Midrash) of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar" [Hebrew], *Hadashot Arkhilogiyot* 30 (1969): 1–2.

Scholarly gymnastics immediately began, attempting to connect the epigraphical Eliezer ha-Qappar with the known literary rabbi—an exercise made easier by what was then thought to be a third-century building. This early archaeological dating—no longer accepted—would fit generally the dates of the literary rabbi. Urman could never explain how Eleazar/Eliezer made it from Lod to out-of-the-way Dabbura, but no matter.

The next phase of research—at least in America—focused on what kind of “rabbi” Eliezer was. Was he in fact to be equated with the “literary rabbis,” as Urman and others assumed, or should we distinguish rabbis found archaeologically—Shaye Cohen’s “epigraphical rabbis”—from the sages of the Talmudim?<sup>32</sup> Cohen argued that these “rabbis” are distinct from those of the literary sources, though he never explained why an “epigraphical rabbi” needs a *beit midrash*—which makes him look an awful lot like a literary rabbi. Stuart Miller and Israeli scholar Benzion Rosenfeld understood this conundrum for the stark category formation—and desire to limit rabbis—that stood at its core. Where Miller and Rosenfeld see a broad rabbinic community, some of them known from literary sources, others not, Cohen, and more recently fellow Smith student Hayim Lapin, tend to limit the influence of this group.<sup>33</sup>

For Miller, the issue of whether Eliezer ha-Qappar is *the* Eleazar ha-Qappar is not a significant question. What is important is the association of *an* Eliezer ha-Qappar with a *beit midrash*, and this suggests a generally “rabbinic” association. According to Cohen, this is not a problem either—the study house in Dabbura belonged to an epigraphical rabbi of the same name rather to a literary rabbi. Other “epigraphical rabbis” certainly existed in this region—witness “Rabbi Abun” of a funerary marker from Qasrin—though no “literary rabbis” are known from this region.<sup>34</sup> A similar situation obtains elsewhere, including the funerary corpus from distant Zoar and in a number of Palestinian synagogue inscriptions.<sup>35</sup> The funerary inscription of “Rabbi Joshua b. Levi ha-Qappar” in Sepphoris<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981): 1–17. See more recently Günter Stemberger, “Rabbinic Sources for Historical Study,” *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and A. Avery-Peck (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 175–176.

<sup>33</sup> Hayim Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 3 (2011): 311–346. Lapin conveniently catalogs all known evidence of “epigraphic rabbis” in the Levant.

<sup>34</sup> On the Rabbi Abun inscription, see Urman, “Public Structures,” 478–480.

<sup>35</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 51, 57–58(?), 115–116. At Na’aran, the daughter of a rabbi also is listed as a benefactor. *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> This artifact has not yet been published. In the meantime, see Eric Weiss, “מצאת צדיק,” *Maariv*, September 18, 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/943/364.html> (accessed

together with the Beth She'arim inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek are analogous to ours, as names that appear in rabbinic sources also appear there.<sup>37</sup> By late antiquity, the land was peopled with men who were called "rabbis," and no literary sources, not even patristic or Qaraite sources, suggest the existence of a protest movement or alternate group of Jewish *literati* distinct from the rabbinic community.<sup>38</sup> One might imagine that other "epigraphic study halls" existed, though this is the only one that can be firmly identified that has been found to date—and of it, only its lintel.

What, though, if this structure was intentionally identified as the "study house" of the "literary rabbi"—or some unknown "epigraphic" member of the rabbinic community of the same name—as a kind of monument to this sage by Jews of this village in the fifth or sixth century when the stone was carved? After all, rabbis were holy men, and as holy men, they needed to function somewhere. If, as the sixth-century Piacenza pilgrim suggests, both Christians and Jews identified a synagogue in Nazareth as the childhood school of Jesus, and even a specific bench was identified as Jesus' bench,<sup>39</sup> might not Jews too have peopled the land with their heroes—developing local traditions of rabbinic presence in this or that place and marking this presence archaeologically? Just as *aggadic* traditions developed the hagiographic descriptions of biblical and rabbinic figures far beyond descriptions that appear in earlier texts, could not Jews—accustomed by this point to the Christian impulse to identify specific sites with biblical heroes and saints of the church—have done the same? Dalia Terifon and Miller have made a similar argument regarding the peopling of the Galilee with priestly courses.<sup>40</sup> Is the Dabbura lintel a relatively early example of a rabbinized geography in the making—one

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August 2012); "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi" [Hebrew], Wikipedia, [http://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99\\_%D7%99%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%A2\\_%D7%91%D7%9F\\_%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%99](http://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99_%D7%99%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%A2_%D7%91%D7%9F_%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%99) (accessed August 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Miller, *Epigraphical Rabbis*, 38–48, enumerates these inscriptions.

<sup>38</sup> Stuart S. Miller, "Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: a Region in Transition*, ed. J. Zangenberg, H. W. Attridge, and D. Martin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 375–402; Ze'ev Weiss, "Were Priests Communal Leaders in Late Antique Palestine?: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, ed. D. R. Schwartz and Z. Weiss in collaboration with R. A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91–111.

<sup>39</sup> *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* 5, cited in Andrew Jacobs: *Relics of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 127–128.

<sup>40</sup> See below, p. 186.



that comes to full fruition in literary sources of the early Middle Ages (and whose success may be felt today in orange signs placed throughout the Galilee)? In other words, are we dealing with a form of hagiography?<sup>41</sup> My instinct is to suggest that we are.

Another *beit midrash*: In 1994 I suggested that a small room in Beit Shean, excavated by Dan Bahat in 1970, might be a “study house” based upon its inscriptions (Figure 37a–c).<sup>42</sup> This sixth-century structure is approximately seven meters square, and is located in a complex containing



Figure 37a.

Figures 37a–c. Mosaics from the proposed study house at Beit Shean B (photographs by Steven Fine).

<sup>41</sup> I first raised this possibility in a short note that appeared in “‘Their Faces Shine with the Brightness of the Firmament,’” n. 38, pp. 73–74. Zev Safrai comes to similar conclusions: *The Missing Century: Palestine in the Fifth Century, Growth and Decline* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 64. In a turn from the general approach of his article, Lapin seems to be moving in a similar direction: “He [Eliezar ha-Qappar at Dabbura] may be an otherwise unknown Rabbi who happens to share a name and epithet with a known Rabbi (or two) from more than a century earlier, and an epithet with another epigraphical rabbi from Sepphoris. However, another possibility may be entertained: that late antique rabbinic circles created meeting places and invented histories for them that linked them to earlier antecedents. That, if it were true, would give us some measure of the institutionalization of the rabbinic movement.” Lapin, “Epigraphical Rabbis: A Reconsideration,” 330.

<sup>42</sup> Fine, *This Holy Place*, 100–101.





Figure 37b.



Figure 37c.

the “house of Leontis” and a bath (itself a complicated complex), both bearing dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>43</sup> The walls of this small room were lined with benches, with perhaps the remains of a Torah niche on the southern (Jerusalem) wall.<sup>44</sup> The carpet mosaic is decorated with an inhabited scroll motif, with a menorah at its center. There are three inscriptions within this building, all commemorating anonymous benefaction. This in itself is a rare phenomenon, as most Jewish benefaction inscriptions name the donors. Dedicatory inscriptions were usually the way that individuals were honored by the community for their benefactions. Anonymity sets aside this purpose.<sup>45</sup> The Aramaic inscription reads (Figure 37a):<sup>46</sup>

דכירין לטב כל בני חבורתה קדישתה  
דהנון מתחזקין בתקונה דאתרה  
[קדי]שה ובשלמה תהוי להון ברכתה אמן  
... רוב שלום חסד בשלום

Remembered for good all the members of the holy society (*havurta qadisha*)  
who support the repair of the holy  
place and its completion. May they have blessing. Amen  
... in abundant peace, covenant love in peace.

In Cairo Genizah documents, “holy society” refers to a high-level rabbinic academy.<sup>47</sup> On a local level, a *piyyut* from the Genizah<sup>48</sup> laments the

<sup>43</sup> Dan Bahat, “A Synagogue at Beth-Shean,” in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 82–85.

<sup>44</sup> Bahat suggests that this niche may explain why the pattern of the southern side of the mosaic’s frame is wider than the other sides. *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> No individual is mentioned in the dedicatory inscription from the synagogue in Jericho. There we read: “God knows their names,” that is, the names of the benefactors (Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 77–79; see also Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions*, 41–43). Ilan and Damati (*Meroth: The Ancient Jewish Village*, 72–87) suggest that a room at Meroth served as a *beit midrash*, and another room as a “study room.” There is no evidence to substantiate these identifications.

<sup>46</sup> Dan Bahat, “A Synagogue at Beth-Shean,” 85.

<sup>47</sup> Mordechai Friedman, “The Minimum Mohar Payment as Reflected in the Geniza Documents: Marriage Gift or Endowment Pledge,” *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 43 (1976), 33; eadem, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1981), 2:304–305; and his “Ono—New Insights from the Writings of the Cairo Genizah” [Hebrew], in *Between Yarkon and Ayalon* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1983), 78–79 nn. 35–40; Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatamid Caliphs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920–1922), 1:454 n. 2. Joseph Yahalom, “Synagogue Inscriptions in Palestine—A Stylistic Classification,” *Immanuel* 10 (1980), 50, n. 11. In liturgy, see *Yaqum Purqan, Seder Avodat Yisrael*, ed. Z. Baer (Palestine: Schocken, 1937), 229; Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 78; Gideon Foerster, “Synagogue Inscriptions and Their Relation to Liturgical Versions” [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 19 (1981), 23–27. On *havrayya* in rabbinic sources, see W. Bacher, “Zur Geschichte der Schulen Palaestina’s im 3 und 4 Jahrhundert, Die Gnossen (*havrayya*),” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 43 (1899): 345–360.

<sup>48</sup> On the destruction of synagogues by Christians in late antiquity, see pp. 195–214 below.

murder of *ḥavurat Ono*, the "society of Ono" (a Jewish town near Lod). Simha Assaf, editor of this text, identifies the *ḥavurah* of Ono as a "yeshiva."<sup>49</sup> Moshe Beer has shown that *ḥavurah* is a regular designation in Amoraic and post-Amoraic literature for gatherings of sages and/or their students for the study of Torah. It is "synonymous with 'Bet-Midrash' and 'Yeshiva.'"<sup>50</sup> Mordecai A. Friedman suggests that "*ḥavurah* of Ono" in our text should be understood as "a poetic expression for the 'Sages of Ono.'"<sup>51</sup> It is thus reasonable to suggest that the "*ḥavurah* of Ono" refers to the local assembly of Ono's sages. Perhaps this is the meaning at Beit Shean B as well. On the model of this *piyyut*, one might conjecture that the "holy society of Beit Shean" might have been known to outsiders simply as *ḥavurta qedishta de-Beishan*. Members of the "holy society of Beit Shean" contributed to the renovation of their "holy place."

Zvi Ilan suggests that the anonymity of the donors in the two Aramaic inscriptions and the "later" Greek inscription<sup>52</sup> at Beit Shean B "is evidence of the communal structure of the community that prayed here."<sup>53</sup> He intuited that this building is the "synagogue of the Sages of Beit Shean."<sup>54</sup> In rabbinic sources a room set aside where rabbis and their followers congregated, studied, and prayed is called a *beit midrash*. It is not beyond credulity to suggest that this hall could have been a study house of the rabbis, though the evidence is admittedly tenuous.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, evidence for study houses in late antique Palestine is really very slight. This is not surprising, based upon what we know about rabbis, their numbers, and their distribution. *Literati* are never a large percentage of any society, and late antique "holy men" were not a numerically large group within any late antique community.<sup>56</sup> The only way to identify a

<sup>49</sup> Simha Assaf, "An Early Lament on the Destruction of Communities in the Land of Israel" [Hebrew], in *Texts and Studies in Jewish History* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1946), 10. Friedman, "Ono—New Insights," 73–85.

<sup>50</sup> Moshe Beer, "On the *Havura* in Eretz Israel in the Amoraic Period" [Hebrew], *Zion* 47, no. 2 (1982): xiii. See also Foerster, "Synagogue Inscriptions," 27.

<sup>51</sup> Friedman, "Ono—New Insights," 79.

<sup>52</sup> Bahat, "A Synagogue at Beth-Shean," 85; Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions*, 41–43.

<sup>53</sup> Zvi Ilan, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel* [Hebrew] (Israel: Ministry of Defense, 1991), 177, my translation.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See Urman's discussion of the literary and archaeological evidence of study houses ("The House of Assembly and the House of Study") and my comments on the supposed study house at Gamla in "Gamla," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Near Eastern Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Meyers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Cf. Frowald Hüttenmeister, "The Synagogue and the Beth Ha-Midrash and Their Relationship" [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 18 (1981): 42.

<sup>56</sup> The classic studies by Peter L. Brown on the "holy man" are collected in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

*beit ha-midrash* is through its inscriptions. In the case of Dabbura, that is relatively easy, though contextualizing even an explicit inscription reused as *spolia* has proven complex. This complexity is all the more apparent at Beit Shean. Is this small room a study house? A rather intricate reading of the inscriptions based upon rabbinic parallels seems to say so. On the other hand, one erudite scholar has suggested the improbable identification of the “house of Leontis” with a Jewish-Christian group.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the *havurta qedishta* there had nothing at all to do with rabbis.

While the history of the rabbinic community is indeed important for the formation of modern Jewish identities, particularly among American scholars, in contemporary Israel the stakes are far greater. Tourists to Qasrin almost always visit the “Talmudic Village,” known in Hebrew-language advertising as “Park Qasrin.” When Ann Killebrew and I worked to transform this late antique Jewish village into a “Talmudic village” in the early 1990s, I, in my naiveté, could not have imagined the “rabbi-land” it would become in subsequent years.<sup>58</sup> Urman came to imagine the southern Golan, with its wealth of ancient synagogue remains, as a primary area of rabbinic activity. Building upon his equation of our epigraphic Eliezer with the literary Eleazar ha-Qappar, Urman argued that Dabbura was an important rabbinic center and that nearby Qasrin too was a rabbinic center, home of the first generation Amora and student of the literary Eleazar ha-Qappar, Rabbi Hoshaya the Great (or, the elder). He also imagined that the tombstone discovered in Qasrin of “Rabbi Abun, may he rest with honor” (*mishkavo be-kavod*), after whom we named the reconstructed house at the “Talmudic Village,” was an Amora, a “literary rabbi.”<sup>59</sup> Urman went so far as to claim that the *Talmuda de-Qisrin*, the beginning of the order of Nezikin (Damages) in the Jerusalem Talmud, was edited in

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<sup>57</sup> Zev Safrai, “The House of Leontis ‘Kaloubas’—a Judaeo-Christian?,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. P. J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 245–266.

<sup>58</sup> Killebrew and Fine, “Qatzrin: Reconstructing Village Life in Talmudic Times”; Killebrew, Grantham, and Fine, “The Qasrin ‘Talmudic’ House.”

<sup>59</sup> Dan Urman, “The Location of the *Batei-Midrash* of Bar Qappara and Rabbi Hoshaya Rabbah” [Hebrew], in *Nation and History: Studies in the History of the Jewish People*, ed. M. Stern (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 1983), 1:163–172. Urman goes so far as to assert that “It has been established that Rabbi Eleazar’s first student, Rabbi Hoshaya the Great, lived also in the Golan, at Qisrin.” Urman, “Public Structures,” 433 (= Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 129). On Rabbi Abun, see Urman, “Public Structures,” 478–480.

Qasrin—which would make it one of the most important rabbinic centers.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the *Talmuda de-Qisrin* likely emanated from Caesarea Maritima—the home of Rabbi Hoshaya the Great—as Saul Lieberman showed long ago.<sup>61</sup> Urman's oversized claims are a relatively rare example of crossover from academic archaeology to heritage production that has been deeply useful for the settlement movement. His claims have provided academic patina for what has been constructed as a heritage tourism/neo-pilgrimage site—asserting a religious claim on the Golan as Jewish territory that is far deeper than even the extensive archaeological discoveries reasonably suggest.<sup>62</sup> The "Talmudic Village" represents yet another "fact on the ground" in a far larger geopolitical—and for some, cosmic—battle.<sup>63</sup> Our modern search for study houses, like the search for synagogues, is in the end deeply entwined in contemporary identities. Embracing this intertwined reality, we can better understand the history of the early study house and the rabbis who labored there—and ultimately also ourselves and our discipline.

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<sup>60</sup> Urman, "Public Structures," 480–481.

<sup>61</sup> Saul Lieberman, *The Talmud of Caesarea, Jerushalmi Tractate Nezikin* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: n.p., 1931). See Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 173–175; Stemberger, "Rabbinic Sources for Historical Study," 175–176.

<sup>62</sup> Though Urman's associations have not been folded into more traditionalist religious pilgrimage itineraries.

<sup>63</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 22–34; Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 87–99; Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Focusing upon the construction of biblical heritage in Israel, neither Feige nor Abu Haj sufficiently discusses the significance of the rabbinic heritage, likely because the rabbis were not particularly active in what we now call the West Bank or Gaza.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FURNISHING GOD'S STUDY HOUSE: AN EXERCISE IN RABBINIC IMAGINATION



Figure 38. Hagia Sofia, Istanbul, wall mosaic of Constantine IX Monomachus (d. 1055) and Empress Zoe (Wikimedia Commons).

Bridging the gulf separating artifacts and texts is always difficult, and identifying a specific object with a specific group of texts is a precarious undertaking at best.<sup>1</sup> This is all the more so in regard to Jewish culture in Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine, where the literary sources are so few and disparate. An excellent example of this problematic presents itself in a document known as *Pereq Meshiah*, the “Chapter of the Messiah,”

<sup>1</sup> See Fine, “Archaeology and the Interpretation of Midrash,” esp. 217.

which describes “God’s great study house in the world to come.” Published in 1978 from a Cairo Genizah manuscript, this fascinating text reads as follows:<sup>2</sup>

ר' אליעזר בן יעקב  
או' בית המדרש הגדול שלקב"ה  
עתיד להיות שמונה עשר אלפים  
ריבבות פרסיות שנא' סביב שמונה  
עשר אלף וג' וקב"ה יושב כסא  
עליהן ודויד יושב כנגדו שנא'  
וכסאו כשמש נגדי  
וכל הנשים  
השאננות שהיו נותנות שכר  
ומלמדות בניהם תורה ומקרא  
ומשנה ודרך ארץ תמימות  
וישרות עומדות במחצלת ק(נים)  
עשויות גדר לבימה ושומעות  
קולו של זרובבל בן שאלתיאל  
כשהוא עומד כתורגמן

1. Rabbi Eliezer son of Jacob
2. says: The great study house of the Holy One, Blessed be He,
3. in the future will be eighteen thousand
4. myriad parsangs (in size), for it is written: “Its circumference [will be] 18,000” (Ezekiel 48:35).
5. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sits on a chair
6. upon them, and David sits before him, for it is said:
7. “His chair is like the sun before me” (Psalm 89:37). All the teaching women
8. who pay
9. And teach so that their sons may be taught Torah, Scripture,
10. and Mishnah, manners, pious sincerity,
11. and honesty stand by (or, within) reed mats made as a partition for the *bema* and listen
12. to the voice of Zerubabel son of Shaltiel
13. when he stands as interpreter.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Simon Hopkins, ed., *A Miscellany of Literary Pieces from the Cambridge Genizah Collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> The Genizah text reads *meturgaman mishpahah*. The notion of a “family translator” is unknown elsewhere in rabbinic literature, and the “family translator” seems to be a bridge to the next section of the manuscript, which discusses Shabbat *Qiddush*, the wine benediction. See the manuscript editions (n. 62, p. 157, below), which continue with an elaborate drama in the divine courtroom. On the *meturgaman* in synagogue and study house contexts, see York, “The Targum in the Synagogue and in the School”; Urman, “The House of Assembly and the House of Study: Are They One and the Same?”

How is the historian to imagine the “set” for this marvelous dramatic performance? What did the ancients imagine when they heard or read this tradition? It is my sense that through comparison with literary and archaeological sources that are roughly contemporaneous with this document, or at least traditions that were available on the “rabbinic bookshelf” at the time it was written, we can conjure an image of the great divine study house. In this “thick description” I will focus particularly upon the physical setting where the “teaching women” are said to have stood and heard Scripture translated before God, with emphasis upon the divine chair and the “reed mats made as a partition for the bema.” To my mind this text projects the furnishings and practices of earthly study houses as they existed during the late Byzantine and early Islamic period into the heavens. I suggest they may be correlate with synagogue chairs and the remains of stone and wooden *bema* partitions, “chancel screens,” that are preserved in late antique Palestinian synagogues.

### *The Divine Study House*

In our *Pereq Meshiah* text, God has his own study house, just as numerous Talmudic sages (and certain biblical characters) had their own study houses—and as “Rabbi Eliezar ha-Qappar” did in Dabbura.<sup>4</sup> The notion of a heavenly study house is well attested in rabbinic literature, and developed in Amoraic thought in tandem with the “divine synagogue.” A passage in the Jerusalem Talmud (y. Berakhot 5:1, 8d–9a) promises recompense for earthly study house attendance within a larger periscope largely focused upon the synagogue. Regarding the study house, we read:<sup>5</sup>

ר' אבהו בשם רבי אבהו. דרשו את ה' בהמצאו.  
איכן הוא מצוי?  
בבתי כניסיות ובבתי מדרשות.  
קראוהו | בהיותו קרוב.  
איכן הוא קרוב?  
<> בבתי כניסיות ובבתי מדרשות.>>

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 123–132, 136–137.

<sup>5</sup> See Fine, *This Holy Place*, 62–63.

Rabbi! Abbahu!<sup>6</sup> in the name of Rabbi Abbahu: "Seek out the Lord where He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6).

Where may He be found?

In the synagogues and study houses.

"Call upon Him when he is near" (ibid.).

Where is he near?

[In the synagogues and study houses.]

An excellent example of this phenomenon appears in a late Byzantine/early Islamic period collection known as Deuteronomy Rabba (7:1),<sup>7</sup> which similarly promises eternal synagogue and study house attendance for the pious:<sup>8</sup>

כל מי שנכנס לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות בעוה"ז זוכה ליכנס לבתי כנסיות  
ולבתי מדרשות לעתיד לבא. מניין?  
שנאמר: אשרי יושבי ביתך עוד יהללוך סלה.

Anyone who enters synagogues and study houses in this world merits to enter synagogues and study houses in the world to come.

Whence this?

For it is said: "Happy are those who dwell in your house, they will again praise you, selah". (Psalm 84:6)

The promise of heavenly synagogue and study house attendance is here based on the exegesis of Psalm 84:6: "Those who dwell in your house . . . will again praise you." When will this "again" happen? In the world to come, a possibility that was completely believable to the authors of these traditions and their audience(s).<sup>9</sup>

It seems likely that monumental synagogues and some study houses bore an architectural resemblance. We have seen this in regard to the Dabbura lintel when set within the broader context of Jewish remains at Dabbura, and suggested a similar interpretation of the possible study house at Beit Shean, though "house synagogues" and "house study houses" would scarcely be discernible architecturally. An architectural relationship between purpose-built study houses and synagogues is assumed by the editor of *y. Sheqalim* 5:6, 49b, who paired parallel stories about these two institutions assuming a kind of architectural affinity:

<sup>6</sup> This seems to be an error in transmission. See the comments of the Academy of the Hebrew Language edition, ad loc.

<sup>7</sup> Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 306–308.

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy Rabbah (Vilna: Rom, 1878) 6:1 = Midrash Psalms, ed. S. Buber (New York: Om, 1947), 84:3.

<sup>9</sup> Compare Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Temple and the Synagogue," in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. T. G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Brigham Young, 1984), 170 and n. 50.

ר' חמא בר חנינה ור' הושעיה הוון מטיילין באילין כנישתא דלוד.  
 אמ' ר' חמא בר חנינה לרבי הושעיה: כמה ממון שיקעו אבותיי כאן!  
 אמ' ליה: כמה נפשות שיקעו אבותיך כאן! לא הוה אית בני נש דילעון באוריתא?

ר' אבון עבד אילין תרעייה דסדרא רבא.  
 אתא רבי מנא לגביה.  
 אמ' ליה חמי מה עבדית  
 אמ' ליה, "וישכח יש' את עושהו ויבן היכלות." לא הוה בני נש דילעון באוריתא?

Rabbi Ḥamma son of Ḥaninah and Rabbi Hoshayah were walking in a synagogue in Lod.

Said Rabbi Ḥamma son of Ḥaninah to Rabbi Hoshayah: My ancestors donated much money here!

He responded: How many souls have your ancestors dimmed here! Were there no people studying Torah [for them to support]?

Rabbi Abun donated the arches of the *sidra rabba* [that is, the great study house of Tiberias].

Rabbi Mani came to him.

He (Rabbi Abun) said to him: Look at what I have done!

He (Rabbi Mani) responded: "Israel has abandoned its creator and built shrines (Hosea 8:14)! Were there no people studying Torah [for you to support]?"

This architectural affinity between study houses and synagogues is important for my discussion of the bema and partitions of God's study house in *Pereq Meshiaḥ*, where I draw upon synagogue remains in order to interpret the physical structure of the divine *beit ha-midrash*.

*The Holy One, Blessed Be He, Sits on a Chair above Them . . .*

The image of God sitting on a "chair," "upon" or "above" the assembly (יושב) (בסא עליהם) in his study house is derived from Psalm 89:37, "his chair is like the sun before me." The storyteller imagines God in his "chair"—using the biblical term בסא, with David seated nearby. The Targum to Psalms interprets: "his chair *shines* like the sun before me" (ובורסיה נהיר היך) (שמשא לקבלי).<sup>10</sup> This is the sense, I think, that *Pereq Meshiaḥ* imagines. Sources suggest that seating in the study houses of the rabbis was indeed hierarchical, and a number of rabbis sat in "chairs" when they taught.<sup>11</sup> The association of chairs with authoritative teaching appears as early as

<sup>10</sup> On the בורסי, see Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 254.

<sup>11</sup> See most recently Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 324–327, for literary sources and discussion of chairs discovered in Palestinian and diaspora synagogues.

Matthew 23:2–3, which has it that “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.” In some manuscripts of the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:7 (fifth–sixth century), the Amora Rabbi Aḥa explains the form of Solomon’s legendary throne (1 Kings 10:19) with the explanation that Solomon’s throne was “like *this* throne of Moses” (כהדא קתדרה דמשה). The direct object, “Like *this* . . .” suggests that Rabbi Aḥa gestured toward a synagogue or study house chair.<sup>12</sup> Other manuscripts of the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* do not read “throne of Moses,” but rather a “throne of marble [or, polished limestone]” (כהדא קתדרה דשישה).<sup>13</sup> Large stone chairs—too quickly identified by scholars with the literary “throne of Moses”—have been discovered in a number of Palestinian synagogues, including near the southern, Jerusalem-aligned wall of the Hammath Tiberias A synagogue, and most prominently in the Chorazin synagogue (Figure 39).

The Chorazin chair was apparently placed on a platform adjacent to the Torah shrine, on the Jerusalem-aligned southern wall of the synagogue.<sup>14</sup> Made of basalt, this chair has large handles on either side, the finials of which were formed as lion heads. It was likely colored, as other artifacts in this region were.<sup>15</sup> Is this the kind of “chair” to which *Pereq Meshiah* alludes, projecting the seating arrangements in late antique study houses heavenward? Rabbinic sources describe golden chairs—in the Alexandria

<sup>12</sup> *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:7 (ed. B. Mandelbaum [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962], 1:12). See Wilhelm Bacher, “Le Siege de Moise,” *Revue de Etudes Juives* 34 (1897): 299–301; M. Ginsburger, “La ‘Chaire de Moise,’” *Revue des Études Juives* 90 (1931): 161–165; Marc Bregman, “The Darshan: Preacher and Teacher of Talmudic Times,” *The Melton Journal* 14 (1982), <http://www.uncg.edu/rel/web%20page%20edits/Darshan.pdf> (accessed May 2012); Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Were the Rabbis Leaders of Communal Prayer? The Evidence of the New Testament, Josephus, and the Early Church Fathers,” reprinted in *The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays in Jewish Hellenism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 270–272. See Eleazar L. Sukenik, “The Throne of Moses in Ancient Synagogues” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 1 (1929): 145–151; Cecil Roth, “The ‘Throne of Moses’ and Its Survivals,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 81 (1949): 100–111; I. Renov, “The Seat of Moses,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 5 (1955): 262–267; L. I. Rahmani, “Stone Synagogue Chairs: Their Identification, Use, and Significance,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 40, nos. 2–3 (1990): 192–214.

<sup>13</sup> On “marble” in rabbinic literature, see Grossmark, “‘Shayish’ (marble) in Rabbinic Literature” and my discussion, pp. 91–92 above.

<sup>14</sup> Ze’ev Yeivin, “Reconstruction of the Southern Interior Wall of the Khorazin Synagogue” [Hebrew], *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985): 274–275.

<sup>15</sup> Fine, “Menorahs in Color: On the Study of Polychromy in Jewish Visual Culture of Roman Antiquity,” 8–17.





Figure 39. Basalt chair, Chorazin synagogue (American Colony, Jerusalem, Photo Department, courtesy of the Library of Congress, ca. 1920–1933).

synagogue,<sup>16</sup> Solomon's throne, and others—sometimes studded with precious stones.<sup>17</sup> Did the storyteller imagine God having a golden or otherwise brightly colored chair that “*shines* like the sun”? Christian artisans of late antiquity certainly made this connection, portraying Christ sitting upon golden thrones, decorated with precious stones.<sup>18</sup> What of David seated before God? His presence too responds to Psalm 89—David is

<sup>16</sup> t. Sukkah 4:6 and parallels. See my discussion in *This Holy Place*, 43–45.

<sup>17</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 105–108.

<sup>18</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979).

treated as the subject. Taking this interpretation another step, is David “seated” before God as a student is seated before a teacher in the study house? Is he in the position of a communal leader beside a dignitary, as in a synagogue? Finally, is the “throne of God” an eschatological replacement in this tradition for the Torah shrine of the earthly study house or synagogue, a site of particular sanctity within the synagogue, owing to the presence of God’s Law?

In Hekhalot literature we hear of a similar scenario, with David sitting “on a throne which was prepared for Him [that is, by God] opposite the throne of his Creator.”<sup>19</sup> In both traditions, David sits before God in the public space of the study house as Byzantine kings sat before Christ in imperial churches and palaces. Sivertsev has recently compared the notion of David and his messianic descendent enthroned on the Temple Mount with Byzantine notions of kingship, suggesting that Jewish notions deeply reflect Byzantine imperial ritual.<sup>20</sup> In the course of his rich discussion, Sivertsev correctly cites Averil Cameron’s description of the interior arrangement of the “Golden Chamber,” the *Chrysotriklinos*, built by Justin II (d. 578 CE) in the imperial palace in Constantinople. Cameron writes that the “whole conception and décor [of the throne-room] expressed the idea of the emperor in his throne-room as a microcosm of God in heaven.”<sup>21</sup> Our *Pereq Meshiah* text does not assert the kind of unanimity between God and his messiah that appears in the Jewish and Christian literature discussed by Sivertsev. Nonetheless, the physical proximity between the enthroned divinity and his anointed is certainly present. A particularly evocative image asserting the proximity between the emperor and Christ that stands at the base of my interpretation appears in a wall mosaic of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople showing Constantine IX Monomachus (d. 1055) and Empress Zoe standing before the ruler of all, the *Cosmocrator*. Christ, like “the Holy One, Blessed be He” of *Pereq Meshiah*, is seated on a shining—and in this case jewel-studded—golden chair within the “holy place.” This throne shines with gold and precious stones and was ever more grand—and moving—when the candles of the church flickered and the chair appeared “like the sun before me” (Figure 38).

<sup>19</sup> Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 126. See also §105 and Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 189, n. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 172–196.

<sup>21</sup> Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London: Variorum, 1981), 17; Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity*, 195.

*"Reed Mats Made as a Partition for the Bema"*

What about the "reed mats made as a partition for the *bema*" upon which Zerubabel, a member of the Davidic—that is, messianic—line, translated Scripture? The use of the term *bema* in our text is significant. *Bema* is a term that often appears in rabbinic literature, denoting the podium where Scripture is read. A Tosefta passage (t. Sukkah 4:6) portrays the "double colonnade of Alexandria," the great synagogue of that city, as having "a wooden platform (*bema*) in the center."<sup>22</sup> This text is a projection of the Tannaitic sages of the second or early third century onto the Alexandrian synagogue. This wooden *bema*, in turn, seems to be modeled upon the wooden platform (*migdal ets*) from which Ezra reads Scripture in Nehemiah 8:4 and parallels the *bema* upon which m. Sotah 7:8 says the king stood in the Temple to read publicly from the Torah on the first day of Sukkot after a Sabbatical year (*hakhel*).<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, neither of the Palestinian Talmud texts that refer to *bemot* in synagogues are useful in locating the *bema* spatially. All we can tell from y. Megillah 3:1, 73d, is that there was a question of whether the synagogue *bema* had the greater "holiness of the ark" or the lesser "holiness of the synagogue." Yerushalmi Yevamot 13a refers to a large podium, a *bema gedolah*, that a community constructed for its newly appointed rabbi, whether in a synagogue or even a study house. It is not clear, from this text, however, where in the building the podium was located.

Large platforms for the Torah shrine, placed on the Jerusalem-aligned wall of the synagogue, were common in Palestinian contexts. These forward platforms increased in size over time. A good example is the synagogue *bema* of Ma'oz Hayyim in the Beit Shean valley. The development of the shrine area at Ma'oz Hayyim is representative of the general expansion of shrine compounds in basilica-type synagogues: a Torah shrine on the Jerusalem wall in the first phase (third century) was replaced by a shrine set within an apse in the second phase (fourth century) and a raised platform enclosed by a "chancel screen" appearing in the third phase (fifth–sixth

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<sup>22</sup> See Fine, *This Holy Place*, 43–45. Zev Safrai discusses whether there was a central platform in "the middle of the prayer hall," coming to conclusions similar to my own. See Zev Safrai, "Dukhan, Aron and Teva: How Was the Ancient Synagogue Furnished?," in *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, ed. R. Hachlili, B.A.R. International Series 499 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1989), 74–77.

<sup>23</sup> t. Sotah 7:13–14.

century).<sup>24</sup> Within the church context this platform was called a *bema*, though no synagogue inscription provides a name for this construction.<sup>25</sup> Though this term appears in no Jewish epigraphic source, the Christian parallel, the use of this term in two Palestinian Talmud passages in reference to synagogues, and the common use of this term in regard to podia in other rabbinic sources<sup>26</sup> make it likely that this was the name used by synagogue communities as well.

The Babylonian Talmud does not refer to a *bema* within Babylonian synagogues, and no Gaonic source of which I am aware uses this term either.<sup>27</sup> Sources from Fatimid Egypt, which often reflect earlier Palestinian practice, do not use the term *bema*,<sup>28</sup> nor do they refer to a platform before the Torah shrine.<sup>29</sup> This is the case in documents from the Cairo Genizah as well, where we hear rather of an *ambol* (from the Greek-Latin-Coptic *ambol[e]*), a masonry construction in the center of the hall from which “special sections of the service and the reading of [scriptural] lectures” took place. The *ambol* was architecturally distinct from the Torah shrine, and like the Christian *ambol(e)* it was constructed in the center of the room.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the term *bema* does not appear in Babylonian, Gaonic, or Genizah sources may support Zev Safrai’s suggestion that the text is of Palestinian origin<sup>31</sup>—or at least, perhaps, from the Palestinian rabbinic orbit of eastern Mediterranean Jewish communities.

<sup>24</sup> Vassilios Tzaferis, “The Ancient Synagogue at Ma’oz Hayyim,” *Israel Exploration Journal*, 32 (1982): 215–244; Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure,” 384–385; R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 160, 221–224; Habas, “The *Bema* and the Chancel Screen,” 112–115.

<sup>25</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 295–296; C. Deloyve, “*Bema*,” in *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. K. Wessel (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1966), 583–599.

<sup>26</sup> Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, 1:522.

<sup>27</sup> Safrai discusses Gaonic sources in “Dukhan, Aron and Teva,” 75–77.

<sup>28</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Laws of Prayer* 11:3, apparently influenced by the tradition in t. Sukkah 4:6, speaks of a central *bema*. This use of *bema* reflects his well-known preference for Hebrew terminology over loan words in this work.

<sup>29</sup> Compare S. D. Goitein, “Ambol—The Raised Platform in the Synagogue” [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 6 (1960): 162.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 162–167, esp. 163; S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 2:146–147 nn. 9–11. See also Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs*, 1:222 n. 2. For a survey of archaeological evidence for bemas in the churches of Byzantine Palestine and Arabia, see Habas, “The *Bema* and the Chancel Screen,” 115–119.

<sup>31</sup> Safrai, “Dukhan, Aron and Teva,” 78–79; Ze’ev Safrai, “When Was Gender Segregation Introduced in the Synagogue?,” *Moment* 15, no. 2 (1990): 8.

The term *gader* is used for many types of partitions in rabbinic sources.<sup>32</sup> The use of this term to describe the structure by (or within) which the women stood is consistent with rabbinic usage. It is used, for example, in y. Berakhot 4:1, 7d,<sup>33</sup> describing the addition of benches to the rabbinic assembly (*beit ha-vaad*) at Yavneh after the famous deposition of the patriarch, Rabban Gamaliel.<sup>34</sup>

וכמה ספסלין היו שם?  
 ר' יעקב בן סיסי אמ': שמונים ספסלים היו שם שלתלמי' חכמ' חוץ מן  
 העומדין לאחורי הגדר.  
 ר' יוסי ביר' אבון אמ': שלש מאות היו שם חוץ מן העומדין לאחורי הגדר.

How many benches (*safsalin*) were there?

Rabbi Jacob son of Sisi said: There were three hundred there, excluding those who stood behind the partition.

Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Abun said: There were three hundred there, excluding those who stood behind the partition.

The partition mentioned in this text is not so high that those who stand behind it cannot hear, and perhaps see as well.<sup>35</sup> This is the case for the women in *Pereq Meshiaḥ* as well.<sup>36</sup> Reed mats that served as partitions for *bemot* like those mentioned in our tradition are not extant from Palestine.<sup>37</sup> Genizah documents speak of "reed mats" within Fatimid-period synagogues, some of which were "large" and used for seating on the floor.<sup>38</sup>

"Chancel" screens from late antique Palestinian synagogues provide a reasonable context for interpreting the *geder la-bema* of *Pereq Meshiaḥ*. Objects identified in English as synagogue "chancel screens" and "chancel

<sup>32</sup> For examples see Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, 2:705–707.

<sup>33</sup> = y. Taanit 4:1, 67d. See also Deuteronomy Rabba 1:8, ed. S. Lieberman (Jerusalem: Shalem, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> On the sources for this event, see Robert Goldenberg, "The Deposition of Rabban Gamaliel II: An Examination of the Sources," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972): 167–190.

<sup>35</sup> *Gedarim* ranged in height from low walls of ten handbreadths to tall structures. Examples are cited by Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, 2:705–707. See especially Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 75a, where the partition is clearly high enough to block vision but allows the person on the other side to hear. See also b. Sanhedrin 67a.

<sup>36</sup> A "partition" is not discussed in the Babylonian version of our story (b. Berakhot 27b–28a).

<sup>37</sup> A tradition preserved in b. Aruin 62a, which is unrelated to the synagogue contexts, describes mat partitions, *meḥsalot godrot*.

<sup>38</sup> S. D. Goitein, "Ambol—The Raised Platform in the Synagogue," 166; eadem, "The Synagogue Building and Its Furnishings according to the Records of the Cairo Geniza" [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 7 (1964): 82, 90–92; eadem, *A Mediterranean Society*, 1:149–150.





Figure 40. Bema area, Ein Gedi synagogue (photograph by Ziko van Dijk, Wikipedia Commons).

screen posts” have been discovered throughout the Land of Israel, from Dalton in the Upper Galilee to the vicinity of Gaza in the south. These screens have been uncovered in both apsidal basilicas and in a broad-house-type synagogue.<sup>39</sup> The remains of a wooden or reed screen have been hypothesized in the Ein Gedi synagogue, an interpretation supported in a recent study by Steven Werlin (Figure 40).<sup>40</sup> Sukenik posited a wooden fence surrounding the *bema* of the Beth Alpha synagogue, and S. Levy interpreted four sockets at the front of the apse of the Maon

<sup>39</sup> Gideon Foerster, “Decorated Marble Chancel Screens in Sixth-Century Synagogues in Palestine and Their Relation to Christian Art and Architecture” [Hebrew], in *Actes du XI<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d’Archeologie Chretienne*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1989), 1809–1820; Joan R. Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Churches,” *Art Bulletin* 74, no. 3 (1992): 375–394. For a comprehensive survey of the archaeological evidence, see Habas, “The *Bema* and Chancel Screen,” 111–130.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Barag, Yosef Porat, and Ehud Netzer, “The Synagogue at En-Gedi,” in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 117. Steven H. Werlin, “The Late Antique Synagogues of Southern Palestine” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2012), 131, writes that: “The excavators hypothesized that the postholes supported a wooden chancel screen. This suggestion presumably was based in part on the lack of any marble fragments uncovered. Moreover, chancel screen bases from churches in Palestine typically include shallow troughs between the postholes to provide additional support for the weighty panels. The lack of such grooves suggests that the panels were of a lighter material such as wood.”





Figure 41. Synagogue screen, Ashdod (© Museum of Cultural History—University of Oslo, Norway, photograph by Mårten Teigen).

(Nirim) synagogue as evidence of wooden posts to which a screen had been attached.<sup>41</sup> In basilical synagogues, which date to the late fifth and sixth centuries, “chancel screens” served to enclose an often broad *bema* which stood before an apse on the Jerusalem-aligned wall. Within the apse stood the Torah shrine, and in some, one or more large stone or metal menorahs. Chancel screens have been uncovered in apsidal basilicas at Beit Shean A, Rehov, Ma’oz Hayyim, Ein Gedi, Gaza, Ashkelon, Hammath Tiberias, and Na’aran (Figures 6, 41–43).

<sup>41</sup> Sukenik hypothesizes a “wooden grating,” *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, 19. See also S. Levy, “The Ancient Synagogue at Ma’oz (Nirim)” [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 6 (1960): 77–82; O. Yosef, “The Synagogue at Ma’oz” [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 19 (1987): 208–215.

The broadhouse-type synagogue at Khirbet Susiya in the Mt. Hebron region contains a unique arrangement. There an ornate screen surrounded the main podium before the Torah shrine of a broadhouse-type synagogue. In both apsidal basilicas and the Susiya broadhouse, the screen served to emphasize and distance the area of the Torah shrine from the assembled community.<sup>42</sup> The “chancel screen,” together with the entire arrangement of the Torah shrine compound within apsidal basilicas, was borrowed from contemporary churches.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Michael Avi-Yonah has shown that the “chancel screen” uncovered in the Hammath Gader synagogue was made in the same workshop as the one discovered in the Monastery of the Lady Mary in Beit Shean/Scythopolis. While at Beit Shean a cross appears within a wreath at the center of the screen, at Hammath Gader a menorah appears.<sup>44</sup> In her important study of the chancel screen, Lihi Habas correctly suggests that marble screens were “introduced only in the mid 6th c., generally in the later or latest phase(s) of the building.”<sup>45</sup>

Scholars agree that the “chancel screen” was borrowed directly from Christian church architecture. Yoram Tsafrir reflects the consensus when he states that for Jews, “The *bema*, apse and ‘chancel screen’ were not imbued with special status, as they were in the church, where they were reserved for the priesthood and for the mystical and ‘awesome’ rites that were hidden from lay worshippers.”<sup>46</sup> The meaning for Jews, however, is less clear. It is obscured by the use of “chancel,” a term with a specific ecclesiastical connotation, in reference to the synagogue and its furnishings.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See Zeev Yeivin, “Khirbet Susiya, the Bima and Synagogue Ornamentation,” *Ancient Synagogues in Israel*, ed. R. Hachlili, B.A.R. International Series 499 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1989), 93–100; see now Werlin, “The Late Antique Synagogues of Southern Palestine,” 197–216.

<sup>43</sup> Yoram Tsafrir, “The Byzantine Setting and its Influence on Ancient Synagogues,” in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (Philadelphia: American Schools for Oriental Research, 1987), 151. See also Asher Ovadiah, “Reciprocal Relationship between Churches and Synagogues in the Land of Israel during Late Antiquity” [Hebrew], in *Between Herman and Sinai: Memorial to Amnon*, ed. M. Broshi (Jerusalem: Yedidim, 1977), 163–164.

<sup>44</sup> See Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure,” 379; Habas, “The Bema and Chancel Screen,” 120–128.

<sup>45</sup> Habas, “The Bema and Chancel Screen,” 120. Add to this list the apparently Samaritan synagogue at Beit Shean A, discussed by Habas, “The Bema and Chancel Screen,” 113. It is fascinating that Samaritans too seem to have borrowed this form from the Church, especially since screens of this sort are unknown from other buildings identified as Samaritan synagogues.

<sup>46</sup> Tsafrir, “The Byzantine Setting and its Influence on Ancient Synagogues,” 152. On chancel screens in churches, see Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure,” 380–383; Habas, “The Bema and Chancel Screen,” 115–120, 124–128.

<sup>47</sup> Sukenik and Goodenough seem to refer to synagogue “screens” and not to chancel screens. See E. L. Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of el-Hammeh (Hammath-by-Gadara)* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1935), 58–69; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 1:240, 241.

What Jewish purpose did the screen serve when it was taken over into the synagogue? Clearly it was intended to separate the *bema* from the hall, though it is unclear why this might be necessary in late antique Palestinian Judaism. One avenue for interpretation, perhaps, may be suggested on the basis of a text preserved in y. Megillah 3:1, 73d–74a. This text, redacted circa 400 CE, gives concrete expression to a notion first expressed two centuries earlier in m. Megillah 3:1. According to the Mishnah, the Torah scroll is the source of holiness within a synagogue context. Objects that are closer to the scroll are considered to be more holy. Thus, the cloth wrappers in which a Torah scroll is wrapped are holier than the chest (*teva*) in which the scrolls are stored, and the scrolls cabinet is more holy than the synagogue building. The Jerusalem Talmud divides the synagogue interior into two distinct realms, those parts of the synagogue that are in close and constant contact with the Torah scrolls, and those which are more distant:

כל כלי בית הכנסת כבית הכנסת.  
 ספסלה וקלטירה כבית הכנסת.  
 כילה דעל ארונא כארונא.  
 ר' אבהו יהב גולתא תחתוי ההן בילן.  
 רב יהודה בשם שמואל. בימה ולווחין אין בהן משום קדושת ארון יש בהן משום  
 קדושת בית הכנסת  
 אינגלין אין בהן משום קדושת ארון. יש בו משום קדושת בית הכנסת.

All the furnishings of the synagogue are like (in holiness to) the synagogue. Its bench (*saḥsal*) and its couch (*qaltara*) are like (in holiness to) the synagogue.<sup>48</sup>

The curtain (*kila*) on the ark (*arona*) is like (in holiness) to the ark.

R. Abbahu put a cloak (*golta*) under the curtain (*bilan*).

Rav Judah in the name of Samuel: the *bema* and planks (*levahin*) do not have the sanctity of the ark, and do have the sanctity of the synagogue.

The reading table (*ingalin*) does not have the sanctity of the ark, and does have the sanctity of the synagogue.

Objects within the synagogue are divided into the superior “sanctity of the ark” or the lower “sanctity of the synagogue.” Those that might fall into either category are discussed by our third- or fourth-century text. It is possible that when the frontal *bema* surrounded by a “chancel screen” developed some centuries later, there were Jews who broadened the categories set out in our text (or others like them that are unknown to us) so as to include the *bema*. The enlarged *bema* of the fifth–sixth centuries would thus have paralleled an expanding notion of the Torah shrine’s

<sup>48</sup> Fine, *This Holy Place*, 70; Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 344–345.



Figures 42a–b. Synagogue screen fragments, Ashkelon (a: courtesy of George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies, b: photograph by Steven Fine).

sanctity. All of this, of course, is only conjecture on a subject on which we would like to know much more than we do.

Joan Branham has suggested that the synagogue “chancel screen” was related to the fence that surrounded the Temple of Jerusalem, beyond which gentiles were forbidden to enter.<sup>49</sup> This relationship is in part linguistic, as the same word is used for the Temple partition and that of the synagogue in modern Hebrew. In *m. Middot* 2:3 this fence, which is said to have been “ten handbreadths high,” is called a *soreg*.<sup>50</sup> This term is today used in modern Hebrew to describe synagogue “chancel screens.” As far as I can ascertain, the first scholar to use this term to denote a synagogue “chancel screen” was Sukenik in his 1934/5 description of the screen

<sup>49</sup> Joan R. Branham, “Sacred Space under Erasure.” On the temple screen, see Elias Bickerman, “The Warning Inscriptions of Herod’s Temple,” in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 2:210–224.

<sup>50</sup> *Tractate Middot*, ed. A. S. Kaufman (Jerusalem: Har year’eh Press, 1991), 45. On the size of a handbreadth, see Jacob Z. Lauterbach, “Weights and Measures in Rabbinical Literature,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12:486, 489.

from the Hammath Gader synagogue. Sukenik referred to this construction somewhat tentatively. First he mentioned "this area in which the holy ark was separated (*gadur*) with a *ma'akeh* [fence]." Later in the same paragraph he refers to the partition as "a *ma'akeh* or *soreg*," grasping for a term corresponding to "screen," which is what he usually called it in his English publication.<sup>51</sup> In the conclusion of his Hebrew discussion, Sukenik settled upon the term *soreg*, describing the "marble panels of the *soreg* which was beside the holy ark."<sup>52</sup> This choice of *soreg*, the term commonly used in discussions of chancel screens in Hebrew since Sukenik, asserts a philological relationship between the ancient *soreg* of the Jerusalem temple and the modern term *soreg* for the screen of the ancient synagogue. This connection is strengthened by the fact that many of the extant synagogue screens are approximately "ten handbreadths high," roughly the same size as the Temple *soreg*.<sup>53</sup> It was during this period that the Torah shrine came to be called an "ark" after the biblical "ark of the covenant,"<sup>54</sup> its curtain a *parokhta* after the Temple veil,<sup>55</sup> and seven-branched menorahs<sup>56</sup> often stood on the *bema*. Though it is possible that some Jews conceptualized the synagogue partition in terms of the Temple partition, there is no archaeological or literary evidence to support this interpretation.

According to our text, mothers who support their son's studies in this world are promised a reward in kind, *middah ke-neged middah*, in the world to come. Rabbinic literature describes a number of women who visited study houses, beginning with the matriarch Rebecca during her tumultuous pregnancy, who "went to inquire (*li-drosh*) of the Lord" (Genesis 25:22), which the rabbis take to mean that she went to request guidance from the sages in the *beit ha-midrash*.<sup>57</sup> While in this world these exemplary "teaching women" have little status in the rabbinic study house, in the world to come they are promised a front row center position before the *bema*. The idea of mothers supporting the study of their

<sup>51</sup> E. L. Sukenik, "The Ancient Synagogue of Hamath Gader" [Hebrew], *Journal of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* 3 (1934/35): 48; eadem, *The Ancient Synagogue of el-Hammeh (Hammath-by-Gadara)*, 37–38, 58–69.

<sup>52</sup> Sukenik, "The Ancient Synagogue of Hamath Gader," 59.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Ze'ev Yeivin reports that two chancel screens from Susiya are 90 cm in height. "Khirbet Susiya, the Bima and Synagogue Ornamentation," 94, figs. 6, 8.

<sup>54</sup> y. Taanit 2:1, 65a, discussed in Fine, *This Holy Place*, 80.

<sup>55</sup> y. Yoma 7:1, 44b; Megillah 4:5, 75b; Sotah 8:6, 22a. Discussed in Fine, *This Holy Place*, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Fine, *This Holy Place*, 114–116.

<sup>57</sup> Genesis Rabba 63:6 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 683–684), and the sources cited there. See Fine, "Study Houses and Synagogues," 76–79, for further examples.



male offspring is well known from rabbinic sources.<sup>58</sup> Pious women who facilitate the education of their sons and husbands are promised a reward in kind in the messianic (or heavenly) *beit ha-midrash*. While implicit in our tradition, this notion is stated explicitly in b. Berakhot 17a:

[תנו רבנן]<sup>59</sup>  
גדולה הבטחה שהבטיחון הקדוש ברוך הוא לנשים יותר מן האנשים,  
שנאמר: "נשים שאננות קמנה שמענה קולי בנות בטחות האזנה אמרתי."  
אמר ליה רב לרבי חייא: נשים במאי זכיין?  
באקרויי בנייהו לבי כנישתא,  
ובאתנויי גבריהו בי רבנן,  
ונטרין לגבריהו עד דאתו מבי רבנן.

[Our Rabbis taught:]

Greater is the promise which the Holy One, Blessed be He, made to the women than that which He made to the men.

For it is written: "Rise up you *sha'ananot* women, hear my voice; promised (*bothot*) daughters, hear my voice" (Isaiah 32:9).

Said Rav to Rabbi Ḥiyya: How do women gain merit?

By their sons reciting Scripture in the synagogue,<sup>60</sup>

And by their husbands studying [rabbinic traditions] in the house of our rabbis,

and by waiting for their husbands until they return from house of our rabbis.

The behavior for which the *sha'ananot* women receive the divine promise of merit before God is their willingness to educate their sons and husbands. *Sha'ananot* is read as *shannot*, "teaching," clearly against the simple meaning of Isaiah 32:9, which the Revised Standard Version translates: "Rise up, you women who are at ease (*sha'ananot*), hear my voice; you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech."<sup>61</sup> The first half of the verse

<sup>58</sup> Sources are collected by Samuel Safrai, "Female Torah Sages in Rabbinic Literature" [Hebrew], *Maḥanayim* 98 (1964): 58–59.

<sup>59</sup> According to the Munich manuscript and other medieval manuscript traditions. See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduqei Sofrim*, 1:16. For other variants, see note *hay*. See also Exodus Rabba, (ed. Vilna), 28:2; b. Sotah 21a.

<sup>60</sup> See Rabbinowicz, *Dikduqei Sofrim*, 1:16, note *hay*.

<sup>61</sup> The medial *alef* of *sha'ananot* was apparently not vocalized by the author of this tradition. Manuscripts and inscriptions that reflect late antique Hebrew and Aramaic orthography suggest that the use of *alef* as a medial letter was quite fluid. It was discarded in some cases, and inserted into other words. See Jacob N. Epstein, *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 1234–1237; E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic*, trans. M. Sokoloff (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1976), 82–83; Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 31, referring to inscription 12 from Gush Halav; Michael Sokoloff, "The Hebrew of Genesis Rabba, Manuscript Vatican 30" [Hebrew], *Leshonanu*, 33 (1969): 25–42, 135–149, 270–279.



is interpreted by our midrash: "Rise up, you *teaching* women," or more correctly, you "facilitators of teaching." This is clearly the intended meaning of *sha'anant* in *Pereq Meshiah* as well.

### *A Medieval Version of the Pereq Meshiah*

A second version of *Pereq Meshiah*, first attested in a manuscript that was copied in Ashkenaz during the fifteenth century,<sup>62</sup> contains a reading of our text that demonstrates the difficulty in determining the correct denotation for our "reed mats made as a partition for the *bema*." According to this text the women "*stand by (or, within) reed partitions* and listen to the voice of Zerubabel son of Shaltiel when he stands as translator before the Holy One, Blessed be He."<sup>63</sup> The differences between the Genizah and the printed version are clear. Where the Genizah version reads *meḥtsalat qanim*,<sup>64</sup> the medieval version reads *meḥitsot qanim*. Both of these constructions appear in rabbinic idiom. More important, however, is what is left out by the medieval version. Here the women stand by "reed *meḥitsot*," and the word that follows in the Genizah version, *la-bema*, "for the podium," is deleted. It is likely that the copyist of this tradition dropped off the phrase *la-bema* for the simple reason that he could not imagine a context in which a *bema* could have a fence around it. In addition, it is likely that he transformed the word *maḥtsalat* into *meḥitsot*, a simple orthographic procedure, because synagogues during his own period had partitions called by this name that were used to separate women from men within synagogue contexts. *Meḥitsot* of various materials that separated men from women within synagogues are attested from the thirteenth century onward.<sup>65</sup> The earliest source to which scholars

<sup>62</sup> Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, ms. 222. See also the version of our text that appears in a manuscript which, according to its colophon, was copied in Mantua in 1643 (Russian State Library, Moscow, Ginzberg Collection no. 688: 87). This text was published by Adolf Jellenek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash* (Vienna, 1853–1858; reprint, Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 3:75, followed by Yehuda Ibn-Shmuel, ed., *Midrashei Geula* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954), 341. Ibn-Shmuel discusses the printed editions of this text on p. 301.

<sup>63</sup> Z. Safrai, "Dukhan, Aron and Teva," 78–79.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., m. Kilayim 4:4; Baba Batra 4:8, 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Pisqei Mordekhai* (in *Babylonian Talmud*, Vilna: Rom, 1888), Shabbat, no. 311. Sources on the separation of men and women in synagogue contexts are collected by David Golinkin, "The *Mehitza* in the Synagogue" [Hebrew], in *The Rabbinical Assembly of Israel Law Committee Responsa* (Jerusalem: Rabbinical Assembly of Israel, 1987), esp. 14 and n. 7. See J. M. Rosenthal, "The History of the Partition in the Synagogue" [Hebrew], in *Mehitza Studies and Texts* (Jerusalem: Reuben Maas, 1966), 2:162–167.



Figure 43. Synagogue screen, Tiberias (photograph by Steven Fine).

point for the use of the term *meḥitsah* within the synagogue context is Mordecai son of Hillel (d. 1298), who mentions the “*meḥitsah* that is made at the time of the homily between the men and the women.” The revisions to our text during the Middle Ages assume the separation of women within the synagogue environment using a *meḥitsah*, as in late medieval synagogues.<sup>66</sup> Not understanding the original denotation of our text, the medieval scribe simply changed it, a well-known procedure that is bemoaned by medieval and modern scholars alike. Although an important source for the history of the medieval synagogue, the medieval variant has no significance for the history of the ancient synagogue.

To conclude, the Genizah version of *Pereq Meshiaḥ* preserves a rich description of God’s study house that offers us a fascinating window into the spaces where Jewish liturgy was acted out during the late Byzantine and early Islamic periods. I have suggested, rather provocatively, I think, that we should take the image of God on his “chair” seriously, and suggested contexts in ancient Jewish and Christian art that might help us to

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Z. Safrai, “Dukhan, Aron and Teva,” 78–79.

imagine what the storyteller was imagining. I have focused my discussion, however, upon the enigmatic “partition for the *bema*,” and parallel terminology in rabbinic sources, Christian architecture, and particularly the archaeology of the ancient synagogue, suggest that this “partition” might be imagined in terms of synagogue “chancel” screens. The screen, derived from the church chancel screen, was considered to be so basic to Jewish public architecture that *Pereq Meshiah* projects it into the divine domain, into the future “great study house of the Holy One, Blessed be He.” On a methodological level, the interplay between philology and the artifacts that Talmudists refer to as *realia* is a highly complex process, bringing together objects and texts with the assumption that they may, in some way, be related to one another. In this essay I have made just this sort of leap, providing a “thick description” of aspects of “the great study house of the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the future”—with a focus on the partition that surrounded the podium upon which God sat in judgment—in terms of synagogue architecture from late antique Palestine. Simultaneously, I suggested a possible Jewish denotation for a synagogue artifact that was borrowed from church architecture, the “chancel screen.”



## CHAPTER NINE

### THE JEWISH HELIOS: A MODEST PROPOSAL REGARDING THE SUN GOD AND THE ZODIAC ON LATE ANTIQUE SYNAGOGUE MOSAICS<sup>1</sup>



Figure 44. Recently damaged zodiac panel, Hammath Tiberias B, Ila (photograph by Steven Fine).

One dark night in late May 2012, the Hammath Tiberias synagogue mosaic was vandalized by a group of irate ultra-Orthodox Jews.<sup>2</sup> I found out about this destruction as I landed at Ben Gurion Airport for a conference in Haifa. Opening my e-mail, I found “condolences” from scholars in America who had heard of the destruction in the American media. It sounded really bad. As one Israeli outlet put it: “Vandals Cause ‘Irreparable Damage’ to 1,600-Year-Old Mosaics in Tiberias Synagogue.” As I was to be in the

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to my colleague Professor Joseph Angel for fieldwork at the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue, to my student Shimshon Ayzenberg, who brought the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue to my attention, and to artist Zehava Benjamin for discussing her work with me.

<sup>2</sup> Michal Shmulovch, “Vandals Cause ‘Irreparable Damage’ to 1,600-Year-Old Mosaics in Tiberias Synagogue,” *The Times of Israel*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/1600-year-old-mosaic-in-tiberias-synagogue-vandalized/> (accessed May 2012).

eastern Galilee that week, I rushed to Tiberias to see for myself what had happened. Thankfully, the cleanup was well underway a day after the vandalism was discovered. I learned from the conservators on site that geometrically patterned mosaics were completely destroyed. These mosaics had been left safely in their original position by the excavators, and were thus susceptible to this then-unimaginable damage. Thankfully, the most important parts of the floor had been mounted in concrete long ago. Though attacked, the damage to them was less extreme. The menorahs and Torah ark panel were hurt—to my surprise—far more than the Helios panel and the zodiac wheel of the mosaic. The vandals of Hammath Tiberias left behind spray-painted graffiti, declaring in one Hebrew taunt: “for each grave [desecrated]—a[n archaeological] site.” These hooligans—roundly condemned by members of their own communal leadership<sup>3</sup>—were indiscriminate. Part of a growing problem of vandalism at archaeological sites, they literally wanted to strike a blow in the *Kulturkampf* between extreme elements of their community and the “secular” state.<sup>4</sup> There was no visual “program” to their destruction and no “anti-art” ideology—which were the first things I looked for. This was not systematic theological iconoclasm. Were this destruction discovered centuries from now, however, on even more fragmentary mosaics, one could easily imagine scholars claiming otherwise—as is often done with evidence for ancient defacement (where, in fact, ancient iconoclasm was an important factor). If nothing else, the destruction of the Hammath Tiberias mosaic may serve as a warning regarding the limits of interpretation. The reasons for this destruction are very local, and deeply ideological, but are not tied to questions of “art.” Helios came out relatively unscathed, while the menorah and the Torah ark—both clearly recognizable and in other contexts revered by the vandals—were severely hurt. It is my contention that we scholars have overinterpreted the art of the ancient synagogue, overlaying levels of meaning on the material that this small and somewhat repetitive corpus cannot bear.

One test that I find useful to control my own imagination is to apply the approaches I am suggesting for ancient art to more modern contexts where our knowledge is far more complete. If the approaches “work” for the present, I tend to trust a bit more their viability as tools for the interpretation of the past. An excellent place to exemplify this approach

<sup>3</sup> As reported on Israel Radio, May 29, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See “Violence Ramps Up Against Israel’s Archaeological Sites,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, no. 5 (2012).



is the image of the zodiac, and particularly of Helios, in mosaic floors from Palestine, beginning with the Hammath Tiberias mosaic. The first synagogue carpet mosaic decorated with a zodiac, Helios at its center, was excavated by archaeologists of Jerusalem's École Biblique at Na'aran (Ein Duq) in 1919 (Figure 61).<sup>5</sup> The Beth Alpha synagogue was discovered a decade later (Figures 45–46). It was excavated by E. L. Sukenik in late December and January, 1928/9.<sup>6</sup> The next important discoveries were made by Moshe Dothan at Hammath Tiberias in 1961 and 1962 (Figure 44),<sup>7</sup> and by Ehud Netzer and Ze'ev Weiss at Sepphoris in 1993 (Figure 47).<sup>8</sup> The immediate response of scholars to the discovery of the Na'aran and Beth Alpha mosaics was to interpret them in light of Jewish literary sources and to compare these images with Jewish art of later periods, where the image of the zodiac is extremely well represented. During the second half of the twentieth century, however, these zodiac mosaics, and particularly the image of Helios at the center, emerged as a crux in the study of late antique Palestinian Judaism. Beginning with the pre-World War II research of E. R. Goodenough,<sup>9</sup> historians of religion have focused upon this image, treating it as a premiere example of what came to be called "nonrabbinic Judaism," a form of popular Jewish expression that was conceived as an almost reciprocal counterpoint to the rationalist and deeply elitist "rabbinical Judaism" constructed by scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and given voice by the equally elitist Harvard don, George Foot Moore.<sup>10</sup> Hovering in the background for this community was the emerging focus upon symbols as conceived by Carl Gustav Jung and the Eranos group—of which Goodenough, his younger contemporary Morton Smith, and Smith's teacher, Gershom Scholem, were active members—with its notion that visual "symbols" bear deep meaning and that no detail, however small, is insignificant.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 82–85.

<sup>6</sup> Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*.

<sup>7</sup> Moshe Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias: Early Synagogues* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Ze'ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1996); Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue*. For an excellent discussion of formal characteristics of the Jewish zodiac mosaics as well as Roman parallels, see Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 35–53.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., E. R. Goodenough, "New Light on Hellenistic Judaism," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 5 (1937): 18–28; eadem, "Symbolism in Hellenistic Jewish Art: The Problem of Method," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56 (1937): 103–114; eadem, *Jewish Symbols*.

<sup>10</sup> See George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries*.

<sup>11</sup> Steven M. Wasserstrom has characterized this intellectual community in his *Religion after Religion*.

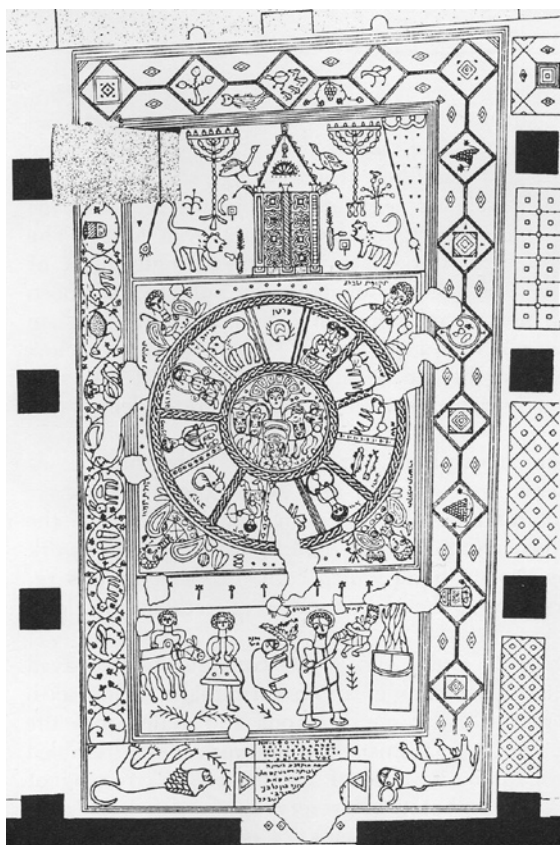


Figure 45. Beth Alpha synagogue mosaic pavement (after Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, pl. XXVII).

“Symbols” served these scholars in their project of constructing an alternative, nonlegalistic narrative of Jewish history, a model of interpretation rooted in the work of Walter Bauer and other German Protestant scholars.<sup>12</sup> As such a symbol, Helios at the center of synagogue mosaics has received considerable attention, with scholars identifying him within the broadest possible range of contexts, as anything from an angel,<sup>13</sup> including

<sup>12</sup> Walter Bauer, *Reichtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1934); English translation, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel, translated by members of the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Mordecai Margalioth identified a Greek prayer to Helios in Hebrew script in a text that he called *Sefer ha-razim*, but how widely such a professional magic text could have



Figure 46. Zodiac, Beth Alpha synagogue mosaic pavement (after Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, pl. X).

Metatron,<sup>14</sup> to Jacob,<sup>15</sup> Elijah,<sup>16</sup> “divine power,”<sup>17</sup> and God himself.<sup>18</sup> This speculation is facilitated by the fact that Helios is the only figure in the

been known or even understood by Hebrew readers is very doubtful. See Margalioth's introduction to *Sepher ha-razim* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Achronot, 1966), 12–16; Morton Smith, “Helios in Palestine,” *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1982): 199\*–214\*. Many thanks to Professor Hans Dieter Betz for discussing this interpretation of the magical corpus with me.

<sup>14</sup> Jodi Magness, “Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues,” in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina. Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium, W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research, Jerusalem, May 29–May 31, 2000* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2003), 363–389; eadem, “Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 1–52.

<sup>15</sup> A. Bittner, “The Image at the Center of Synagogue Zodiac Wheels: Is This the Image of Jacob?” [Hebrew], *Derekh Aggadah*, 17–56.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer, “Jewish Pictorial Art in the Late Classical Period,” in *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, ed. C. Roth, 2nd ed. revised by B. Narkiss (London: Vallentine Mitchel, 1971), 90; Lucille Wadson, “Chariots of Fire: Elijah and the Zodiac in Synagogue Floor Mosaics of Late Antique Palestine,” *ARAM Periodical* 20 (2008): 1–41.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine: Selected Essays*, ed. H. and Y. Tsafirir (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), 396–397.

<sup>18</sup> See Martin Goodman, “The Jewish Image of God in Late Antiquity,” in R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz, eds., *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven:



Figure 47. Zodiac, Sepphoris synagogue mosaic pavement (photograph by Steven Fine).

zodiac panel that is not provided with an identifying label—itself a significant point that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been previously noted.

In *Art and Judaism*, I focused on the zodiac, suggesting that it was borrowed from the general context, but that its popularity in synagogues was related to the deep engagement of late antique Jews with the heavens, especially as given expression in a wide variety of ways in Palestinian Jewish literature of late antiquity.<sup>19</sup> In this approach, I took my lead from art historical rather than religious studies models, from early writings by

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Peeters; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2003), 133–145; M. Bar Ilan, *Astrology and Other Sciences among the Jews of Israel in the Roman-Hellenistic and Byzantine Periods* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2010), 297–309. Stuart S. Miller summarizes the positions taken in “‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19.” For somewhat different perspectives, see Yaffa Englard, “Mosaics as Midrash: The Zodiacs of the Ancient Synagogues and the Conflict between Judaism and Christianity,” *Review of Rabbinic Literature* 6, nos. 2–3 (2003): 189–214; Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements*, 53–56.

<sup>19</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 198–207.



E. L. Sukenik, Mordechai Narkiss, Karl Lehmann, and Michael Avi-Yonah.<sup>20</sup> Approaches to Christian art by historians and art historians who grapple with the meeting point of artifact and text have been extremely important, most prominently Peter L. Brown, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robin Jensen.<sup>21</sup> I treated the image of Helios at the center as an element of zodiac design that was taken from the general late antique visual repertoire together with the zodiac itself, offering a kind of formal interpretation and avoiding polemic against what I see as overly specific identifications of the iconography. My purpose was to cool the discussion of Helios by dissipating some of the scholarly heat, especially as this type of intensive interpretation has no contemporary parallel in scholarship on Roman art, early Christian art, or Islamic art of which I am aware.

My attempt at elision, it turns out, was overly positive, as the focus on identifying a singular Jewish interpretation of Helios continues to garner considerable interest.<sup>22</sup> For this reason, I return in this note to Helios and the zodiac. In order to fully elucidate my position, however, I begin not with Helios, but with a surprising element within the decoration of a contemporary synagogue, applying some contemporary approaches to the zodiac to an artifact whose context we fully control, a stained-glass window created during this decade for the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue, a predominantly Arabic-speaking congregation in Flatbush, Brooklyn, by Jerusalem-based Israeli artist Zahava Benjamin (Figure 48a–b).<sup>23</sup> My focus is a large, golden, stained-glass window that fills an arch directly above the Torah shrine of the synagogue. Dedicated in 2000, this window is decorated with a stylized image of Jerusalem, looking generally toward the west. Directly to the right of the Ten Commandments of the Torah shrine is the image of two domes, a smaller one to the left and a larger one to the right—the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Figure 50b).

<sup>20</sup> Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*; Mordecai Narkiss, "The Zodiac in Jewish Art" [Hebrew], *Kirjath Sepher* 16 (1939–1940): 513–519; Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine*, 396–397. See also Karl Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 1–27; this article should be read together with T. Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 142–150.

<sup>21</sup> See Jensen's broadly methodological volume, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> In recent studies, Miller, *Epigraphical Rabbis*, and Laura S. Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010), 199–200, 203, reach conclusions similar to those presented here.

<sup>23</sup> The synagogue is located at 805 Avenue T, Brooklyn, NY, 11223–3341. For Zehava Benjamin, see <http://zehavab.co.il> (accessed May 2012).



Figure 48a.

Figures 48a–b. Torah shrine of the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue, Brooklyn, by Zehava Benjamin (courtesy of Shimshon Ayzenberg).





Figure 48b.

Imagine this window were it to be discovered in fragments and reconstructed a thousand years from now. What might modern scholars say about it? One could imagine the debate that would break out, between those who assert that the synagogue is illustrated, say, for decorative reasons and those who see a more theological explanation. One could imagine a scholar arguing that the image to the right of the tablets was included specifically as an anti-Christian polemic,<sup>24</sup> and another seeing an affirmation of a connection between the commandments and the tomb of Christ. In support of the latter position, it might be argued that the presence of Jews for Jesus is well known from newspaper accounts of Flatbush Jewry,<sup>25</sup> and thus a general breakdown of Judaism at the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>26</sup> This reflects, it could be suggested, evidence for popular Jewish syncretism, or perhaps Jewish Christianity, especially when the tower of

<sup>24</sup> E.g., England, "Mosaics as Midrash."

<sup>25</sup> Steve Lipman, "Messianic Jews Making New Push In Flatbush: Counter-Missionaries Warn of Major Center in Heart of Orthodox Brooklyn, but Residents Seem Unconcerned," *New York Jewish Week*, September 29, 2010, [http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new\\_york/messianic\\_jews\\_making\\_new\\_push\\_flatbush](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new_york/messianic_jews_making_new_push_flatbush) (accessed August 2012).

<sup>26</sup> See my review of Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), *Biblical Archaeology Review* 30, no. 2 (2004): 56–58; Stuart S. Miller, "Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche's *Iudaea-Palaestina*, Schwartz's *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, and Boyarin's *Border Lines* Reconsidered," *AJS Review* 31, no. 2 (2007): 329–362.

Saint Savior Church in Jerusalem is visible elsewhere in the images. Perhaps this reflects the positive results of a Catholic, Greek, or even Coptic or Ethiopian mission, all groups in control of sections of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Perhaps we could argue a particular connection with the Ethiopians, as Christians of African descent are particularly well represented in this section of Brooklyn.

Alternately, it could reflect a kind of Jewish ecumenicalism—a phenomenon expressed in various Jewish contexts since the Second Vatican Council—that parallels the widespread presence of menorahs in contemporaneous American Protestant contexts.<sup>27</sup> Someone could even argue that this is not a synagogue at all, but a church—but that would fly in the face of the numerous dedicatory plaques in Hebrew and English found at the site. Most would agree, minimally, that this is an example of a Jewish community violating in a very prominent location the words of the rabbis against portraying what some, at least, would consider to be *avodah zarah*, idolatry.<sup>28</sup>

Much of what I have written here is rather silly speculation, except that all of these interpretations have been applied to ancient synagogue mosaics by one scholar or another.<sup>29</sup> My own sense is that this window

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<sup>27</sup> I am similarly reminded of the many bronze menorahs and other memorabilia bought by Christian tourists in Israel that now decorate evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant homes and churches, and the recent construction of miniature “Western Walls” as prayer icons. The presence of Israeli memorabilia in contemporary Protestant visual culture has not yet been the subject of sustained study. See Joan R. Branham’s suggestive article, “The Temple That Won’t Quit: Constructing Sacred Space in Orlando’s Holy Land Experience Theme Park,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 36, no. 3 (2008): 8–31. For the growing phenomenon of models of the Western Wall as foci of prayer, see *The Dead Scrolls: Life and Faith in Biblical Times*, traveling exhibition, *Discovery Times Square*, New York, 2012, <http://www.discoverytsx.com/exhibitions/dead-sea-scrolls> (accessed May 2012); Naomi Zeveloff, “Replica of Western Wall Planned in Kansas: Anti-Abortion Activists Plan Site as Part of Pro-Life Shrine,” *The Forward*, July 20, 2012, <http://forward.com/articles/159240/replica-of-western-wall-planned-in-kansas/?p=all> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Levine, *The Rabbinic Class*, 179–181. See more recently Y. Reis, “The Zodiac Wheel in Synagogues in Light of the Laws of Idolatry” [Hebrew], in *‘Al derekh ha-avot: Sheloshim shanah le-Mikhelet Ya’akov Hertsog: Kovets ma’amarim be-noše Torah ve-Hinukh*, ed. A. Bazak, S. Vigodah, and M. Munits (Alon Shvut: Tevunot, 2010), 535–550; Emmanuel Friedheim, “Sol Invictus in the Severus Synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, the Rabbis, and Jewish Society: A Different Approach,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 12, no. 1 (2009): 89–128. Sacha Stern correctly dismisses suggestions that rabbis objected to two-dimensional images such as mosaics. See his “Figurative Art and Halakha in the Midrashic-Talmudic Period” [Hebrew], *Zion* 61 (1996): 379–419; eadem, “Pagan Images in Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues,” *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (London: Duckworth and The Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 241–252.

<sup>29</sup> For a rather whimsical look at archaeological interpretation, see David Macaulay, *Motel of the Mysteries* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

is based upon a general scheme of Jerusalem that appears in New York ultra-Orthodox contexts, including *sukkah* decorations,<sup>30</sup> in which a general view westward is set within a frame that is styled as a turreted wall and recalls, in a general way, the walls of Jerusalem. The artist, Zehava Benjamin of Jerusalem, provided a realistic view of Jerusalem, which included recognizably Moslem sacred architecture as well. The Dome of the Rock, often labeled the “Temple of Solomon,” had served as a very traditional Jewish cipher for the Jerusalem temple from the Renaissance until the early British mandatory period.<sup>31</sup> The community subsequently had Benjamin remove these images.<sup>32</sup> The image of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher went unnoticed, and had seldom before appeared in Jewish art.<sup>33</sup> In fact, until the year 2000 it was difficult to identify the most holy church in Christendom from a distance, an ambiguity that warranted the use of this image in the window. Only recently, clearly responding to the church’s invisibility in a city increasingly marked with religious symbols, was a large golden cross set atop the smaller dome of the church. In other words, Jews and Christians both responded to the invisibility of the Holy Sepulcher. American Jews apparently unwittingly allowed its use without really noting or at least not caring about the Christian identity of the image. Christians publicly marked the dome, thereby staking out their place among Jerusalem’s crowded array of religious symbols. The stained-glass window of the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue serves a community clearly unaware that it has decorated its prayer hall with the image of Christ’s tomb. Were someone to inform them, I can imagine responses ranging from indifference to a movement toward changing the window.

Let us now return to Helios. It is well known that numerous “pagan”<sup>34</sup> and Christian parallels to the Jewish Helios mosaics survive from antiquity.

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<sup>30</sup> Sukkahdepot.com, accessed September 2010, and no longer illustrated and offered for sale.

<sup>31</sup> Zev Vilnay, “Images of Jerusalem and Its Holy Places in Folk Art” [Hebrew], *Eretz Israel* 6 (1961): 149–161; Y. Fischer and H. Peled, *Art and Craft in Erets Israel in the Nineteenth Century* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979); Helen Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple: The Image of the Temple in Judaism and Christianity* (London: Oresko, 1979), 65–87. See now Pamela Berger, *The Crescent on the Temple: The Dome of the Rock as Image of the Sacred Sanctuary* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 197–330.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Zehava Benjamin, January 4, 2011. See Berger, *The Crescent on the Temple*, 313–330.

<sup>33</sup> As on a painted textile Sukkah decoration from Copenhagen, late 18th to early 19th century, now in the collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, L-B05.003(a–h).

<sup>34</sup> On the problematic of the terms “pagan” and “polytheists,” see Michele R. Salzman, “Pagans and Christians,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186–189.

Christians clearly Christianized him, as in the *Vatican Ptolemy*, apparently a ninth-century copy of a third-century manuscript.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, they didn't bother. The premiere example is the image called today "Christ as Helios" in Mausoleum M (of the Julii), which was discovered beneath St. Peter's Basilica.<sup>36</sup> This situation is well stated by Niels Hannestad, who asked, "How Did Rising Christianity Cope with Pagan Sculpture?"<sup>37</sup>

Most Christians . . .—and this goes particularly for the upper class—seem to have had a rather relaxed attitude to the pagan past. Apparently many were even proud of their cultural heritage: they commissioned traditionally decorated silverware; their homes were embellished with mosaics with pagan motifs. . . . In this respect they behaved no differently from their pagan fellow citizens—or Jews, when these belonged to the urban Hellenized society.

I would suggest that by the sixth century this attitude went beyond the "urban Hellenized [Jewish] society" of, say, Hammath Tiberias, to even more rural communities. The communities at Hammath Tiberias (late fourth–fifth century) and at Beth Alpha and Na'aran (sixth century) represented Helios in all his glory, while at Sepphoris (fifth century) he was removed from his chariot, yet portrayed nonetheless as a sun disk riding a *quadriga*. It seems that in no synagogue was Helios labeled—conspicuously, he is the only element of the zodiac wheel that is not identified with a Hebrew inscription. At Na'aran, Helios was removed from the mosaic, likely in the eighth century, his presence unacceptable in the increasingly Islamic environment. The archaeological record clearly reflects complexity in Jewish communal attitudes toward the (never labeled) image of Helios on mosaic floors. My own sense, as I have written previously, is that the presence of Helios is nothing more prosaic than the image of the sun set within a more complex zodiac pavement. This iconography was naturalized to Jewish contexts because of the deep Jewish connection to the heavens—relationships that are well expressed in a broad array of homiletical and liturgical sources.<sup>38</sup> Helios, as it were,

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<sup>35</sup> George Hanfmann, "The Continuity of Classical Art: Culture, Myth and Faith," in *The Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. K. Weitzmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 79–82.

<sup>36</sup> On this iconography, see Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 41–44.

<sup>37</sup> Niels Hannestad, "How Did Rising Christianity Cope with Pagan Sculpture?," in *East and West: Modes of Communication. Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida*, ed. E. Chrysos and I. Wood (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 173, 179–180.

<sup>38</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 198–207. See especially Michael Klein, "Palestinian Targum and Synagogue Mosaics," *Immanuel* 11 (1980): 33–45; Joseph Yahalom, "Piyyut as Poetry," in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (Philadelphia: American Schools for

“came with”; and, as we have seen, various communities dealt with that reality in their own ways—ranging from not labeling Helios (Hammath Tiberias, Beth Alpha, Na’aran) to removing him from the chariot (Sepphoris) to erasing him (Na’aran). This, to me, is perhaps the most interesting feature of the Jewish Helios images.

The zodiac mosaic, with Helios at its center, was a useful element of synagogue décor in this region specifically because this imagery so effortlessly complemented the liturgy and homiletics that took place upon it. It is plausible to suggest that these motifs found expression in other areas of synagogue design, and were an integral part of the synagogue environment. A rare example is perhaps a round arch that stood above the main lintel of the synagogue of Meroth. The excavators believe that these stones were carved with images representing the twelve signs of the zodiac.<sup>39</sup> Specific identifications of Helios with particular texts and individuals may be heuristically plausible, but no one identification or text is enough to explain the continued presence of this image over a three-hundred-year period. More than that, the image of Helios appears as an element of a floor decoration, not a sacred image within an aedícula, on a wall, or as a bas-relief that might be venerated. It is a decorative element of ancient “linoleum.”

The latter history of divine images and zodiacs in synagogue decoration provides a useful comparison for our late antique mosaics. As Sukenik and Mordecai Narkiss well knew,<sup>40</sup> and as a 2001 Israel Museum exhibition illustrated, images of zodiacs—including portrayals of the sun and the moon—were common in synagogues that in modern times would be considered indisputably “Orthodox” (the term that replaced “normative” and “rabbinic” in modern descriptions of “ancient Judaism”).<sup>41</sup> Brightly colored zodiacs and the double-headed eagle—this eagle having been

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Oriental Research, 1987), 120. See also eadem, “The Zodiac Wheel in Early Piyyut in Eretz-Israel” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 9 (1986): 313–322; eadem, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* [Hebrew] (Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 20–24. Sukenik (*The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, 36) associates Helios with rabbinic explication of Psalm 19 in *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 6, and parallel texts. Recently Miller, (“‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis”), Englund (“Mosaics As Midrash,” 197–198), and others have explored these traditions, providing an array of texts that may be deployed to bridge between rabbinic thought and this image.

<sup>39</sup> Ilan and Damati discuss other possible examples from Palestinian synagogues in *Meroth: The Ancient Jewish Village*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Imagery from eighteenth-century wooden synagogues was collected and preserved in Sukenik’s photographic archive at the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

<sup>41</sup> Iris Fishoff, ed. *The Realm of the Stars* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2001).





Figure 49. Ceiling of the synagogue of Chodorow, Ukraine, now destroyed (Alois Breier Collection, courtesy of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art).

central to the heraldry of the Byzantine and hence the Holy Roman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires—were both taken over into Jewish ritual art and synagogue decoration.<sup>42</sup> This point was put to good effect by

<sup>42</sup> The eagles were occasionally inscribed with Deut 32:11 or grasping a lulav and shofar in its talons, came to be seen as mark of Jewish traditionalism. See Ilya Rodov, “The Eagle,



Israeli author Shmuel Yosef Agnon, who used the placement of eagles on brass Hanukkah menorahs and the fate of synagogue zodiac paintings as markers of cultural transition.<sup>43</sup> In his 1935 novella, *A Simple Story*, Agnon uses the fate of a zodiac on a synagogue ceiling as a symbol for cultural decline in a Galician town auspiciously called Szybusz (שיבוש)—Hebrew for “Confusion” or “Disruption.” The Szybusz synagogue is first introduced in chapter 3 as a destination for “Zionist speakers” whom the locals took on a tour of local sites, “such as the Great Synagogue with its sun, moon, and twelve signs of the zodiac . . . painted (חקוקים) on its ceiling.”<sup>44</sup> By chapter 20, however, visiting merchants—to the surprise of the locals—did not go to see the Great Synagogue within which the sun, moon, and signs of the zodiac are painted,” and other local sites. Rather, he “eats and drinks and makes his heart glad and does business in Szybusz” and relaxes reading newspapers and the news of the day in the local Zionist club.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the book, chapter 34, the ceiling is painted over, for Agnon a vivid example of a rich local culture fraying—and the work of a local Jewish painter who had just returned from America, no less. Donors are parodied in the traditional dedicatory formula, “remembered for good,” that had been used by Jews from antiquity to the present.<sup>46</sup>

How very happy was Szybusz on the day that they painted the Great Synagogue; but he [a local Jew] caused all the town to boil with anger like Gehennom because they had erased the image of the moon and the twelve signs of the zodiac and painted [over them] a form in the shape of an umbrella (דמות צורת סוכך) spread over the ceiling. After all, these paintings (ציורים) had already aged (נתישנו), and never during the two hundred and sixty-five years since the synagogue was built had they repaired them. When the officials of the gentile government come on the eve of *Kol Nidre* [Yom Kippur] to pay honor to Israel [that is, the local Jews], and to listen to the prayers, they might say that we have slackened our honor of Heaven [of God—a double entendre] by not troubling ourselves to repair our house of prayer. When

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Its Twin Heads and Many Faces: Synagogue Chandeliers Surmounted by Double-Headed Eagles,” in *Jewish Ceremonial Objects in Transcultural Context = Studia Rosenthaliana* 37 (2004): 77–129; Bracha Yaniv, “The Throne of Glory: A Significant Aspect in the Design of Torah Arks in Eastern Europe” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 80, no. 3 (2012): 427–461, esp. 235–6, focuses upon Jewish connotations of this iconography.

<sup>43</sup> Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Ma'aseh ha-Menorah* in *Ir u-Melo'ah* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1973), 29–37.

<sup>44</sup> Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Sippur pashut* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1993), 14. Though the translations are generally my own, I have consulted that of H. Halkin (New York: Schocken, 1985). Many thanks to Elisha Fine for bringing this theme in Agnon to my attention.

<sup>45</sup> Agnon, *Sippur pashut*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 177–178. See pp. 25, 134, 220.



Figure 50a.



Figure 50b.

Figures 50a–b. Bialystoker Synagogue, Manhattan, details of the wall and ceiling paintings (photographs by Steven Fine).

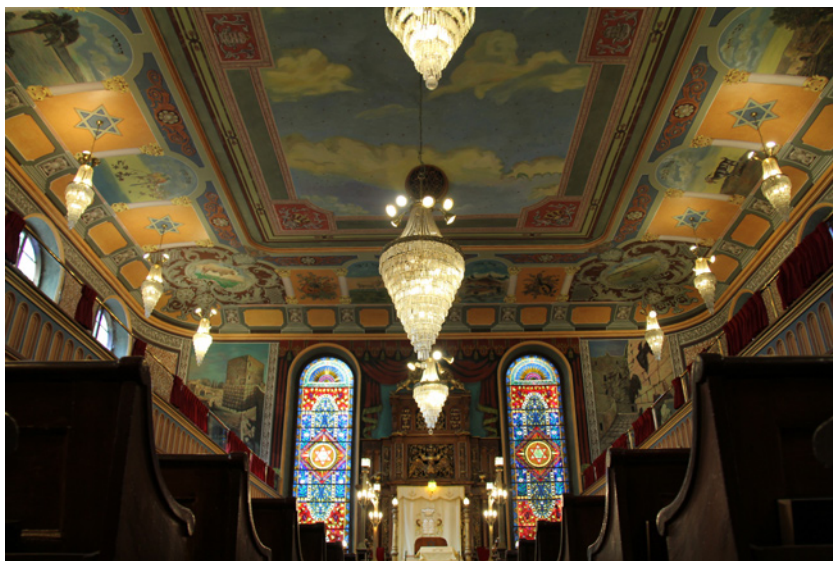


Figure 51. Bialystoker Synagogue, Manhattan (courtesy of Ruth Shach Photography, Toronto).

Schleien the painter (הצייר) returned from America, the sextons brought him and he painted the synagogue. He even painted the walls with gold and silver polka dots, as in the cafeteria of the train station—except that the cafeteria is painted with water-based paint, and those of the synagogue are made of [more costly] oil paints. Remembered are Barukh Meir and Tsirl for good for donating oil paints, which will last for many years...

In Eastern Europe, this tradition of painted synagogues, often with signs of the zodiac, was quite common before the Holocaust (Figure 51), and it is maintained in a few remaining synagogue buildings—most prominently the Bialystoker Synagogue in lower Manhattan (Figures 50a–b, 52).<sup>47</sup> This kind of decoration, as uncommon as it is in our world, was so common in Eastern Europe that Agnon could use its disappearance as a marker of traditionalism in decline.

In short, while the presence of Helios and the zodiac in ancient synagogues is fascinating, I do not see it as startling; it is certainly not a solid foundation to support the twin towers of “rabbinic Judaism” and “nonrabbinic Judaism.” The great success of the late twentieth-century

<sup>47</sup> This synagogue awaits thorough analysis. In the meantime, visit <http://www.bialystoker.org> (accessed May 2012).



Figure 52. Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, Berlin (photograph by Steven Fine).

“nonrabbinic Judaism” movement has been the general acknowledgement that the Jewish world in late antiquity was indeed complex, and that classical rabbinic sources only convey some of that complexity. This said, visual sources provide little evidence for a religion that was greatly



removed from that of the rabbinic *literati* of late Roman and Byzantine Palestine. My sense is that the community of rabbis itself was far more complex than some rationalist *Wissenschaft* scholars could countenance when they articulated the contours of rarified “rabbinic Judaism.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the construction of a dialectically connected “nonrabbinic Judaism” is a modern problem of categorization. It is not, I believe, organically derived from the variety of extant sources.

Once the “symbolist” approach to synagogue zodiacs is shelved, I suggest, we are left with Judaized versions of rather typical Roman iconography appropriated by Palestinian Jews to decorate their synagogue floors and maintained by this slow-to-change culture long after Christians abandoned this imagery—specifically because it fit so well with broader Jewish conceptions of space and time. The differing images of Helios in Jewish mosaics is indicative of local conversations that took place over centuries regarding how to accommodate this iconography on the floor of the synagogue. It is a kind of visual parallel to the conversations rabbis were having about art in antiquity—and continue to have to this day.<sup>49</sup> Medieval and early modern European synagogue communities, confronted with unadorned late antique Jewish liturgical texts that evoke the zodiac, found in these texts the warrant or inspiration to reintroduce images of the zodiac into book and synagogue decoration. This is strong evidence for the overwhelming significance of the heavens in Jewish liturgical life—in antiquity sometimes imagining the sun as Helios, while in early modern Poland sometimes as a double-headed eagle.

In conclusion, it is perhaps significant to note that as early as 1929, the author of the first diachronic survey of Jewish art, Iranian art specialist Ernest Cohn-Wiener, aware of the Na’aran and the recently discovered Beth Alpha floors,<sup>50</sup> came to conclusions similar to those presented here. In *Die jüdische Kunst: Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Cohn-Wiener wrote with what seems to be a bit of tongue in cheek about

<sup>48</sup> Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, 151–176.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the anthology translated by Vivian B. Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Sukenik spoke on the Beth Alpha discovery in April 1929 at the centennial conference of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin. Hebrew University Archives, “Institute of Archaeology,” file 144; reported in the *New York Times*, “Old Mosaics Trace Origins of the Jews,” April 29, 1929, reproduced in Fine, *Sacred Realm*, 5. During that visit Cohn-Wiener is likely to have seen images of the discovery.

a rather conventional neoclassical Berlin building in ways that inspired my own presentation of the Sephardic Lebanese Synagogue window:<sup>51</sup>

To make a comparison [to the figurative bas-reliefs of Galilean synagogues]: in the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaften des Judentums* in Berlin<sup>52</sup> the portal is flanked by two owls, the symbols of wisdom, and two cornucopias, the symbols of plenty, with the head of a lion in the center (Figure 52). Two of these symbols are originally heathen: the owl as the bird of Minerva, and the cornucopia as the symbol of plenty given by the gods. The lion's head acts as an architectonic keystone. However, all this is so much a part of the symbolism of our time that we are no longer aware of its being at all heathen. It was the same with the decoration of the Palestinian synagogues. The Hellenistic style had become so universal, so generalized, that many typical elements were felt to be simply decorative. The interest is in noting what was rejected because it was felt to be heathen, and what was added because it was a Jewish symbol.

I am aware that it may not be possible to convince colleagues committed to what I have called “the symbolist paradigm,” venerable as it now is, of my interpretation. After all, overinterpretation is difficult to counteract, and since Jung, the symbolist impulse has become a strong trend in our culture. One need only remember the most popular recent expression of this hermeneutic, Dan Brown’s 1993 novel, *The Da Vinci Code*—the hero of which is a renowned Harvard “Professor of Religious Symbolology.”<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, I hope that my somewhat more modest—even mundane—object-centered approach will be accepted as a caution.

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<sup>51</sup> Ernest Cohn-Wiener, *Die jüdische Kunst: Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Martin Wasservogel Verlag, 1929), 89–90; translated by A. Bell as *Jewish Art: Its History from the Beginning to the Present Day* (Yelvertoft Manor, Northamptonshire: Pilkington Press, 2001), 92–93. My translation varies somewhat from Bell’s.

<sup>52</sup> Located at Tucholskystraße 9, this building was renamed Leo-Baeck-Haus in 1999 and is home of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland.

<sup>53</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 8. Closing a kind of circle, Brown modeled his hero, Professor Robert Langdon, on Joseph Campbell, “in particular ‘The Power of Myth’ and ‘The Hero With a Thousand Faces.’” See “Dan Brown: By the Book,” *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* (June 23, 2012), 8. See my comments on the Society for Biblical Literature website, “Concerning the Jesus Family Tomb,” SBL Forum, <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=655> (accessed May 2012).



## CHAPTER TEN

### BETWEEN LITURGY AND SOCIAL HISTORY: PRIESTLY POWER IN LATE ANTIQUE PALESTINIAN SYNAGOGUES?



Figure 53. Tabernacle motifs, Sepphoris synagogue mosaic (photograph by Steven Fine).

Jewish literature and art from Byzantine Palestine suggests a fascination with the priestly. This interest builds upon biblical and classical rabbinic sources, where issues related to the priests and the Temple are a central concern. Priestly themes are well developed in Byzantine-period sources, including *midrashim*, *Targumim*, and liturgical sources (especially *piyyutim*), much of which dates to our period. Archaeological remains also exhibit a strong interest in priestly themes. The well-carved (though fragmentary) plaque of the priestly courses discovered in

the synagogue of Caesarea Maritima,<sup>1</sup> three-dimensional seven-branched menorahs,<sup>2</sup> and the once-lovely Aaron panel from the Sepphoris synagogue mosaic are among the most prominent examples of the priestly in synagogue art.<sup>3</sup> This proliferation of priestly themes suggests to a number of scholars that priests in Byzantine Palestine enjoyed higher levels of social and political significance than in previous periods. This approach, first proposed by Samuel Klein and Menahem Zulay, has reemerged and drawn a large number of contemporary adherents.<sup>4</sup> Others have been rightly skeptical.<sup>5</sup> In this essay I argue that extant sources for the Byzantine period do not reflect the expansion of the priests as a sociological group, but rather a deepening interest in priesthood and in priestly motifs

<sup>1</sup> Michael Avi-Yonah, "The Caesarea Inscription of the Twenty-Four Priestly Courses" [Hebrew], *Eretz-Israel* 7 (1964): 24–28; Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 87–88. Hanan Eshel has shown that an inscription from Kissufim is not a fragment of a *mishmarot* plaque. Eshel, "A Fragmentary Inscription of the Priestly Courses?" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 61, no. 1 (1991): 159–161. See also Fine, *This Holy Place*, 88.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ze'ev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue*, 77–80; eadem, "Were Priests Communal Leaders in Late Antique Palestine? The Archaeological Evidence," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, ed. D. R. Schwartz and Z. Weiss in collaboration with R. A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91–111.

<sup>4</sup> The first recent statement of this approach to appear in print is by Joseph Yahalom, *Priestly Palestinian Poetry: A Narrative Liturgy for the Day of Atonement* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 56–57. Recent statements include Oded Irshai, "The Role of the Priesthood in the Jewish Community in Late Antiquity: A Christian Model?," in *Jüdische Gemeinden und ihr christlicher Kontext in kulturträumlich vergleichender Betrachtung, von der Spätantike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. C. Cluse, A. Haverkamp, and I. J. Yuval (Hannover: Hahn, 2003), 75–85; eadem, "The Priesthood in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity" [Hebrew], in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Dinur Center and Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2004), 67–106; Lee I. Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art: The Synagogues at Hammat Tiberias and Sepphoris," *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (Leuven: Peeters; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2003), 91–132; Magness, "Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues"; Paul V. Fleisher, "The Literary Legacy of the Priests? The Pentateuchal Targums of Israel in Their Social and Linguistic Context," in Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 467–508; David Amit, "Priests and the Memory of the Temple in the Synagogues of Southern Judaea" [Hebrew], in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Dinur Center and Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2004), 143–156; Stefan C. Reif, "Approaches to Sacrifice in Early Jewish Prayer," in *Studies in Jewish Prayer*, ed. R. Hayward and B. Embry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165–180. See the far more cautious comments of Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, eds., *Avodah: An Anthology of Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 14–15. See most recently Matthew J. Grey, "Jewish Priests and the Social History of Post-70 Palestine" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2012), which summarizes this stance and many of the primary sources. Many thanks to Dr. Grey for making his dissertation available to me.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart S. Miller, "Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*, ed. J. Zangenberg, H. W. Attridge, and D. Martin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 375–402.

among Jews in the Byzantine period. This deepened concern may have set the stage for the expansion of priestly prerogative during the early Islamic period, though there is no evidence for this phenomenon before that. I will suggest a “liturgical” interpretation for the increased presence of priestly themes in the literary and archaeological remains of Byzantine-period Palestinian synagogues.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning with his 1909 dissertation *Die Barajta der vierundzwanzig Priesterabteilungen*, Samuel Klein focused scholarly attention upon the position of Jewish priests in late Roman and Byzantine Galilee.<sup>7</sup> Klein argues, without providing substantiation, that Judaeon priests inhabited villages that were destroyed during the First Jewish Revolt. He argues for the greater presence of priests in late antique Palestine, organized according to priestly courses, though generally in small numbers outside of recognized centers. He bases this far-reaching and long-lasting conclusion on extant amoraic sources and *piyyutin*. This focus upon priestly influence seems to have had broad appeal. In 1922, for example, Nahum Slouschz, the first “Hebrew archaeologist,” associated the fine limestone menorah that he had recently discovered at Hammath Tiberias with supposed priestly behavior in that synagogue (Figure 54). Slouschz writes: “I could not doubt that we had found here a Menorah made faithfully on the plan of the Menorah of the Holy Temple. This model had unquestionably been used by the priesthood, and had been hidden away for some unknown reasons.”<sup>8</sup> I wonder if undergirding notions of priestly continuity among secularized Jews was the wide dispersion of esoteric ideas of Temple continuity developed by the Freemasons and their Jewish offshoot, *The Independent Orders of B’nai B’rith*.<sup>9</sup> Both were very popular among early Zionists. Slouschz, for example, was a member of both.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I discuss the liturgical approach in Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 167–211.

<sup>7</sup> Kirchhain, 1909; reprint, *Beiträge zur Geographie und Geschichte Galiläas* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909). See also Samuel Klein, *Galilee: Geography and History of the Galilee from the Return from Babylonia to the Conclusion of the Talmud* [Hebrew], ed. Y. Elizur (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1967), 62–68, 176–192.

<sup>8</sup> Slousch, “Recent Discoveries in Palestine,” 336.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Daniel Soyer, “Entering the ‘Tent of Abraham’: Fraternal Ritual and American-Jewish Identity, 1880–1920,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 9, no. 2 (1999): 159–182; Cornelia Wilhelm, *The Independent Orders of B’nai B’rith and True Sisters: Pioneers of a New Jewish Identity, 1843–1914* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011); Marcia Keith Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 12–29. Many thanks to Hasia Diner, Matt Goldish, Jonathan Sarna and Cornelia Wilhelm for discussing these issues with me.

<sup>10</sup> Freemasonry among early Zionist and the implications of that relationship for the development of Zionist culture has not yet been fully explored. See, in the meantime:



Figure 54. The Hammath Tiberias menorah (courtesy of George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies).

In 1952 Menahem Zulai took this approach a step further. Zulai hypothesized that *piyyutim* on the priestly courses “were originally intended for communities in the Land of Israel in which priests were concentrated. With the end of these communities the *piyyutim* disappeared, together with the custom of reciting *qerovot* in memory of the [priestly] courses.”<sup>11</sup> In 1996 Joseph Yahalom returned to this model to explain the fact that numerous *piyyutim* with clear priestly interests did not survive, while midrashic texts of the late Byzantine period did.<sup>12</sup> Yahalom suggests that the reason liturgical poems connected to priestly themes were lost is because they derive from priestly and not from rabbinic circles, and hence were not

Nir Ortal, “Finding Freemasonry in Jerusalem,” *Segulah* (June–July 2010): 60–70. Slouschz’ membership documents in Bnai Brith are preserved in his archive at Gnazim Institute in Ramat Gan. See also: *Yediot ha-Lishkah ha-Gedolah le-Erets Yiśra’el Mišpar 14 bi-Yerushalayim*, ed. Y. Yonovits [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ha-Lishkah ha-Gedolah, 1929), 39; On Slouschz’s connection to Freemasonry, *Sefer Aḥim: 60 Shanah le-Hivasdah shel ha-Lishkah*, ed. D. Tidhar [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Barkai Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons), 65.

<sup>11</sup> Menahem Zulai, “New Piyyutim by Rabbi Hadutha” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 21–22 (1950–1951): 30, my translation.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Yahalom, *Priestly Palestinian Poetry: A Narrative Liturgy for the Day of Atonement* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 56–57.

preserved. One need only reference the prominent role of poems with clear late antique antecedents in the Ashkenazi *Mussaf Avodah* prayer of Yom Kippur<sup>13</sup> to raise doubts as to this contention. Similarly, the fact that extant *piyyutim* are deeply embedded in the culture of the rabbis, and reflect nothing of an alternative religious tradition, militates against this point.<sup>14</sup> A more simple explanation for the disappearance of most late antique liturgical poetry is the nonuse of these Palestinian poems in communities that were increasingly aligned with the Babylonian liturgy.<sup>15</sup>

This jump from literary form to social history has a long history in modern scholarship. It appeared most profoundly in Julius Wellhausen's sociological interpretation of the priestly source of the Pentateuch.<sup>16</sup> More recently this approach has been applied to Second Temple and rabbinic prayer, where specific prayer texts are ascribed to priestly circles on the basis of priestly content. Daniel K. Falk has noted this tendency among some scholars of Qumran and rabbinic liturgy to "discern sociological settings of liturgical elements on the basis of content." Falk is correct in arguing that scholars who adopt this practice "risk subjectivity by identifying stereotyped concerns with different groups."<sup>17</sup> Interest in priestly power in

<sup>13</sup> *Maḥzor la-Yamim ha-Nora'im*, ed. D. Goldschmidt (Jerusalem: Koren, 1970), 434ff.

<sup>14</sup> A quick perusal of the footnotes of scholarly editions of *piyyut* collections makes this point adequately.

<sup>15</sup> See Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); Ezra Fleischer, *Tefilah u-minhagei tefilah Erets-Yisre'eliyim ba-tekufat ha-Genizah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988). This is the case with a host of liturgical poems and Palestinian targum texts as well. One need only remember that just one poem by Yannai was known before Israel Davidson identified one of his works on a Genizah fragment. See Israel Davidson, *Maḥzor Yannai* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1919). This discovery is narrated by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Schocken, 2011), 101–125. Similarly no longer a part of the Ashkenazi liturgy, only one complete manuscript each exists of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Neofiti (the latter itself "lost" in the Vatican libraries until Alejandro Díez Macho recognized it). Moving from literary analysis to social history can be hazardous. See David Goodblatt's comments, "Towards the Rehabilitation of Talmudic History," *History of Judaism: The Next Ten Years*, ed. B. Bokser (Chino: Scholars Press, 1980), 34–35.

<sup>16</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel K. Falk, *Daily, Sabbath and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 54 and n. 150. Falk refers specifically to the work of Johanan Maier, "Zu Kult und Liturgie der Qumrangemeinde," *Revue de Qumran* 14 (1990): 544–545; and Tzvee Zahavy, *Studies in Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990). For an application of this general method, see Morton Smith, "On the *Yozzer* and Related Texts," in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (Philadelphia: American Schools for Oriental Research, 1987), 87–95; Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005); Kära Schenk, "Temple,



Byzantine Palestine is related to a broader theme in Jewish studies during the twentieth century, particularly though certainly not exclusively in North America: the search for “nonrabbinic Judaism.”<sup>18</sup> While sources that reflect the position of the rabbis are read quite narrowly by many of these scholars—hence limiting the possibility of rabbinic influence—scant sources that supposedly reflect priestly ascent are read with far less suspicion.<sup>19</sup> Concern for the priestly does not require the existence of distinct priestly communal loci of power.

What do we know with some reliability about “real live” priests in late antique synagogues? Rabbinic sources reflecting the second through fourth centuries mention priests in synagogues, both anecdotally and in more theoretical terms. What these sources reflect more than anything else is the presence of priests within synagogues, and the ambivalence of the rabbinic community toward priesthood.<sup>20</sup> This is nowhere better illustrated than in rabbinic discussions of the priestly blessing in synagogues. The blessing is both a desired element of the liturgy, and an activity that was closely regulated by the rabbis.<sup>21</sup> This evidence is sometimes centuries earlier than the Byzantine period, however, and thus must be used with caution. The most useful evidence for assessing the stake of priests in Byzantine-period synagogues is inscriptional—at least as far as priests engaged in local euergetism.<sup>22</sup> Of the eighty-seven inscriptions published by Joseph Naveh in Hebrew and Aramaic in his *On Stone and Mosaic*<sup>23</sup> and the thirty-nine Greek inscriptions published by Lea Roth-Gerson,<sup>24</sup> priests appear among the donors in synagogue inscriptions in Aramaic

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Community, and Sacred Narrative in the Dura-Europos Synagogue,” *AJS Review* 34, no. 2 (2010): 195–229.

<sup>18</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 35–46.

<sup>19</sup> See above, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Chaim Licht discusses rabbinic attitudes toward the latter Second Temple period priesthood. Licht, *Ten Legends of the Sages: The Image of the Sage in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1991), 91–100, 103–119. Licht also discusses the priority of the sage over the prophet in rabbinic literature; see *Tradition and Innovation: Studies in Rabbinic Literature* [Hebrew] (Givat-Haviva: Givat-Haviva Press, 1989), 23–32. See also Dalia Trifon, *Ha-kohanin me-hurban Bayit Sheini ve-ad aliyat ha-Natzrut* (Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1985); and Reuven Kimelman, “The Conflict between the Priestly Oligarchy and the Sages in the Talmudic Period (on the Explication of PT Shabbat 12:3, 13c = Horayot 3:4, 48c)” [Hebrew], *Zion* 48 (1983): 135–147.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, m. Megillah 4:4–5. On the priests in synagogue ritual, see Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 496–500.

<sup>22</sup> On this neologism, see A. J. S. Spawforth, “Euergetism,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., 566.

<sup>23</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Roth-Gerson, *Greek Inscriptions*, passim.



from Na'aran<sup>25</sup> and Eshtemoa<sup>26</sup> and in Hebrew from Khirbet Susiya.<sup>27</sup> All of these synagogues are located in Judaea. Among the dedicatory inscriptions from the Sepphoris synagogue mosaic we hear of one "Yudan son of Isaac the Priest" and "...R]euven the Levite."<sup>28</sup> This is the only Levite in a Galilean synagogue inscription. These are but two of many donors mentioned in the mosaic. The same kind of mix appears at Na'aran, Eshtemoa, and Susiya. No priest other than Yudan appears in any synagogue in or near the Beit Netofa Valley in the lower Galilee or in the area of Tiberias—precisely the regions where the majority of priestly communities are placed in *piyyutim* of the priestly courses.<sup>29</sup> If priests were so significant in Byzantine-period synagogues, one might expect far larger numbers of them within this corpus and perhaps more direct references to specific priestly watches in inscriptions—and not just the general references to the Temple cult (including the twenty-four priestly courses) that exist in synagogue art! No "synagogue of priests" of the sort mentioned theoretically in rabbinic sources and no evidence of broad priestly euergetism within Galilean synagogues has been uncovered through excavation. The opposite is in fact evidenced: at Na'aran, Eshtemoa, Susiya, and Sepphoris priests appear as individual donors integrated among donors of other castes (including a Levite at Susiya).<sup>30</sup>

Literary sources that refer to the social settings of Jewish communities during the Byzantine period are in short supply.<sup>31</sup> Jews wrote very little about their social situation in a straightforward discursive manner. Rather, much of what we know is encoded in the interpretation of Scripture, particularly in the *piyyut* literature. Neither Yose ben Yose, Yannai, Eleazar

<sup>25</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 93–94.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue*, pp. 203–206, nos. 3, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Levine, *The Rabbinic Class*, 191.

<sup>30</sup> Levites also appear in a number of inscriptions. Yose son of Levi the Levite is mentioned in inscriptions from Kefar Baram (Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 19–20) and Alma in the Upper Galilee (*ibid.*, 22–23). A Levite was a donor at Hammath Gader (*ibid.*, 57–58), and Yudan the Levite's donations are memorialized in two inscriptions from the Susiya synagogue (*ibid.*, 120–121, 121–122).

<sup>31</sup> Irshai ("The Role of the Priesthood," "The Priesthood") adduces from a small number of patristic sources that with the decline of the patriarchate the Jewish "Priestly class" ascended to authority positions in Byzantine Palestine. He is so sure of this reconstruction that it forms an essential element of the newest (non-)narrative of Jewish history. See Oded Irshai, "Confronting a Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 181–221.

ha-Qallir, Yehuda, or Hadutaha ben Abraham are identified as members of the priestly caste—and all wrote on distinctly priestly themes.<sup>32</sup> The strong focus upon the priesthood in *piyyutim* of Yose ben Yose led medieval copyists to identify this author as *Yose ben Yose Kohen Gadol*, the “high priest.”<sup>33</sup> This reflects careful medieval reading of the text and its contents—but nothing about Yose’s actual priestly pedigree. No demarcated priestly class of poets is reflected in extant sources, though there were clearly priest-poets during the long period of Islamic hegemony. To my mind, there is little substantial evidence for increased priestly involvement in synagogue life during the Byzantine period. As far as the evidence goes, priests existed within synagogue communities in greater or lesser numbers (based upon the presence of priests in a particular village or neighborhood) from Second Temple times onwards. There is simply no evidence for expanded priestly communal power during the Byzantine period.

This is not to suggest that priestly themes did not reach a new prominence in Jewish literature or in synagogue art of the Byzantine period. Scholars are correct in pointing out the increase in priestly themes during this period. Yose ben Yose, for example, lionizes the high priest and sets his service at the very center of creation. He even “cleans up” much of the Mishnah’s ambivalence toward the high priest. Where Mishnah Yoma, chapter 1, treats the high priest as a kind of embarrassment—as a leader only by virtue of birthright—Yose ben Yose erases most signs of negativity.<sup>34</sup> As he did for Ben Sira (another non-priest) before him,<sup>35</sup> the high priest epitomizes everything holy and beautiful.<sup>36</sup> Even the geography of the Galilee was imagined in terms of priestly courses. Stuart S. Miller and Dalia Trifon have shown that the very poems that Klein and Zulay thought proved the transfer of the priestly courses from Judaea to the Galilee after the Bar Kokhba revolt should be seen in a hagiographic sense—as attempts to redefine the geography of the Galilee in Jewish

<sup>32</sup> Swartz and Yahalom write that Hadutahu “was probably also a priest” (*Avodah*, 14), though it is unclear to me on what basis, other than genre.

<sup>33</sup> *Yosse Ben Yosse: Poems* [Hebrew], ed. A. Mirsky (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1977), 13–14. Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, present a selection of early texts from this Yom Kippur liturgy, including Yose ben Yose’s *Atah Konanta ‘Olam be-Rov Hesed* (291–343) and *Azkir Gevurot Eloah* (221–290).

<sup>34</sup> *Yosse Ben Yosse: Poems*, 188ff.; Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 311ff.

<sup>35</sup> Sir 45:6–17, 50:1–29.

<sup>36</sup> See Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 15–20.

terms.<sup>37</sup> Again, while these very different sources certainly show interest in priestliness, this concern did not require a parallel rise in priestly power or prerogative.

We have some idea how Yose ben Yose's poem was acted upon liturgically. It was recited within a synagogue/study house context as part of the Yom Kippur prayers. Within the rhetoric of the Yom Kippur *Avodah*, the liturgical actor, the *shaliaḥ tsibbur*, seems to have acted the part of the high priest,<sup>38</sup> and apparently the congregation acted the role of the Jews assembled in the Temple observing the sacrifice. The synagogue building became the "set" where all of this took place. It is not without significance that the synagogue building was increasingly conceived as a *miqdash me'at*. It was no longer just a meeting house, but a "small temple,"<sup>39</sup> "second to the Temple of Jerusalem."<sup>40</sup> This process of association with the Temple is first seen in Tannaitic literature and accelerates in Byzantine-period literary sources of all sorts, inscriptions, and synagogue decoration. Within the synagogue, local communities participated in liturgy that was not only seen as a replacement for the Temple sacrifice, but often memorialized the sacrifices through liturgical reenactment. Lit menorahs, a Torah shrine called an "ark" after the ark of the covenant, and lists of the priestly courses visually connected the liturgical set, the synagogue, to the locus of "templized" liturgy. At Sepphoris (and conceivably elsewhere as well) one would see on the floor the image of Aaron serving in the Tabernacle dressed in Byzantine-period garb (not unlike like that of the *shaliaḥ tsibbur* standing before him). Intentionally or not, the image of Aaron and the living synagogue leader thus mirrored one another.<sup>41</sup> We do not know whether the *shaliaḥ tsibbur*, the prayer officiant who recited the *Avodah* for Yom Kippur, was a priest. If (and I do mean if) later practice is any indication, priestly lineage was not a requirement. I would say the same of the Palestinian synagogue custom of reciting *piyyutim* each Sabbath that

<sup>37</sup> Stuart S. Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 125–127; eadem, "Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Galilee," 384–394; Dalia Trifon, "Did the Priestly Courses (*Mishmarot*) Transfer from Judaea to the Galilee after the Bar Kokhba Revolt?" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 59, nos. 1–2 (1989–1990): 77–93.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Swartz made this point, arguing that "the poet—who, we must remember, was usually the performer—identified with the priest." See his "Sage, Priest and Poet: Typologies of Religious Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 109.

<sup>39</sup> b. Megillah 29a.

<sup>40</sup> Targum Jonathan to Ezek 11:16.

<sup>41</sup> For more on this approach, see Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 167–211.

recalled the priestly course that would have served in the Temple that week.<sup>42</sup> Such increased interest in the Temple and its service is indicative of increased concern for priestly themes, though not necessarily of increased priestly influence, control, authority, or authorship.

This is not to say that priests participating in synagogue ritual would not have enjoyed an elevated status, that they would not have appreciated priestly images, or even that they might have served in leadership positions (this having been the case at Dura Europos).<sup>43</sup> My point is that the use of priestly imagery may be explained in terms of a general interest in the priestly in Jewish culture of late antiquity. Imbedded in Jewish literature itself—within the Mishnah and its literature and more importantly within the Pentateuch and hence Targum and midrash, is an extremely strong focus on the Tabernacle/Temple and its cult and cultic personnel. This interest was essential to rabbinic (and for that matter, Qumranic) liturgy from the very beginning.<sup>44</sup> The lionization of priests in *targum*, *piyyut*, and some *midrashim* and *halakhic* texts, coupled with the increased idealization of the priesthood and the increasing distance from the Second Temple as time passed, explains the heightened presence of priestly themes in a satisfactory manner.<sup>45</sup> The approach that I am suggesting is firmly based in liturgical studies, where scholars are increasingly aware of the holistic relationship between the liturgical space and the liturgical life of each community.<sup>46</sup>

Samaritan and Christian interest in priestly themes may be significant for contextualizing Jewish interest during late antiquity. The Aaronite

<sup>42</sup> Abramson, "Qerovot," 54–55.

<sup>43</sup> Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, 263–268, 277–278. See Abramson, "Qerovot," 51 n. 8, for a slightly later example.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Sarason, "The 'Intersection' of Qumran and Rabbinic Judaism: The Case of Prayer Texts and Liturgies," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8.2 (2001): 169–181; Fine, *This Holy Place*, 49–55.

<sup>45</sup> This point was made regarding Amoraic literature by Nahum Glatzer, "The Attitude toward Rome in Third-Century Judaism," in *Essays in Jewish Thought* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 1–15.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987). On the relationship between church art, architecture and liturgy, see T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971); S. De Blaauw, "Architecture and Liturgy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Traditions and Trends in Modern Scholarship," *Archiv für Liturgie-Wissenschaft* 33, no. 1 (1991): 1–34; Søren Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography and Ritual: A Study of Analytical Perspectives* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget As, 1984); Gier Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-Century Apses and Catecheses* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

priesthood was paramount within Samaritan culture during this period, as it is—at least in theory—to this day.<sup>47</sup> Synagogue ritual was—and still is—permeated with priestly concerns. The menorah is a common feature of Samaritan visual culture from late antiquity, and the image of a table in the synagogue mosaic from el-Hirbeh has been identified by some as the biblical showbread table.<sup>48</sup> The proximity between Jewish and Samaritan art is exemplified by the fact that a single father-son team of craftsmen is identified in dedicatory inscriptions as the mosaicists of the Jewish synagogue at Beth Alpha and of the apparently Samaritan synagogue of Beit Shean A. Images of Torah shrines in these mosaics are very similar iconographically, with the proviso that at Beth Alpha animal imagery and a *lulav* bunch—common to Jewish art of this era—appear. Samaritans do not make use of *lulavim* on the festival of Sukkot, and Samaritan art avoids animal and human images.<sup>49</sup> The centrality of priesthood and priestly themes among the Samaritans may well have influenced Jewish concern for things priestly. The art and architecture of Jewish and Samaritan synagogues, in turn, are derivative of Christian art and architecture during the Byzantine period. Christian concern for the biblical priesthood and the adaptation of Tabernacle/Temple themes to the ideological construction of the church was a likely influence on Jews, though the medium of communication is unclear. It is my sense that interest in the Tabernacle/Temple was part of the *Zeitgeist* of late antique Palestine, played out by each of these communities.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The last Aaronite high priest died in 1624. Since then, the oldest Levite has served that function. The best survey of Samaritan culture is still Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans* (Leiden: Brill, 1987). See also Fine, "Samaritan Folklore."

<sup>48</sup> Yitchak Magen, "Samaritan Synagogues," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, ed. F. Manns and E. Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 193–230; Reinhard Pummer, "Samaritan Synagogues and Jewish Synagogues: Similarities and Differences," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 118–160. See also Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 159–160; eadem, "Plate with a Menorah and Torah Shrine," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, 109–110.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Jacoby, "The Four Species in Jewish and Samaritan Traditions," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 225–230.

<sup>50</sup> This is a change in nuance from my comments in the earlier version of this chapter, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 56, no. 1 (2005): 8, where I worked within the then-regnant paradigm of intercommunal competition. See my comments in "For the School House is Beautiful: A Note on Samaritan 'Schools' in Late Antique Palestine," in *Shoshannat Yaakov: Studies in Honor of Professor Yaakov Elman*, ed. Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 66–76.

More significant for our purposes is the status of the priesthood at the close of our period, in Fatamid and Abbasid Palestine. In the world preserved in the documents of the Cairo Geniza, the priesthood indeed enjoyed enhanced status and privilege. Priests were prominent in Babylonia, Egypt, and Palestine of this period. Arnold Franklin notes that “The Palestinian yeshiva was explicitly identified with priestly authority on several occasions.”<sup>51</sup> In addition, “memorial lists of geonim of the Palestinian yeshiva demonstrate that the yeshiva was dominated by members of three priestly families from the mid-ninth century onwards.”<sup>52</sup> Franklin attributes this situation to both traditional respect for the priesthood and, more significantly, to the importance of lineage in Islamic culture. A number of *paytanim* who wrote on priestly themes during this period are identified in their patronyms as priests—an apparent shift from the generally nonpriestly poets of the immediate past. These Islamic-period priestly poets include Shimon ha-Kohen be-Rebi Megas,<sup>53</sup> Joshua ha-Kohen, his possible son Johanan ben Joshua ha-Kohen,<sup>54</sup> Reuven ha-Kohen,<sup>55</sup> and Phineas ha-Kohen from Kafra (near Tiberias).<sup>56</sup> The question is whether a situation that existed in Islamic Palestine, under Islamic influence, existed earlier. Ante-dating into this “black hole” is both tempting and difficult, particularly when Judaism of the Greco-Roman period is interpreted in terms of established medieval norms. Great continuity certainly existed between late antique and medieval Judaism, and heightened concern for things priestly under Byzantium would set the stage for the heightened status of priests that becomes evident in the early Islamic period sources.

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<sup>51</sup> Arnold E. Franklin, “Cultivating Roots: The Promotion of Exilarchal Ties to David in the Middle Ages, *AJS Review* 29, no. 1 (2005): 91–110; “Shoots of David: Members of the Exilarchal Dynasty in the Middle Ages” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2001), 176. See now eadem, *This Noble House: Jewish Descendants of King David in the Medieval Islamic East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Franklin, *Shoots of David*, 177.

<sup>53</sup> Menahem Zulay, “Studies in Jannai” [Hebrew], in *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 221–231. *Liturgical Poems of Simon Bar Megas* [Hebrew], ed. J. Yahalom (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> On Joshua, see J. H. Schirmann, “Joshua,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 10:270–271. On the relationship between Joshua and Johanan, see Menahem Zulay, *Studies of the Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry* 5 (1939): 155–157.

<sup>55</sup> Shraga Abramson, “Qerovot le-Hatan” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 15 (1943–1944): 51.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Klein, *Sefer ha-Yishuv* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1939), 90; Trifon, “Did the Priestly Courses (*Mishmarot*) Transfer from Judea to the Galilee?,” 78 n. 11; Ezra Fleischer, “Early Paytanim of Tiberias” [Hebrew], in *Sefer Teveria*, ed. O. Avissar (Jerusalem: Keter, 1973), 368–371; Jeffrey Rubenstein, “Cultic Themes in Sukkot Piyyutim,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 59 (1993): 185–209.



However suggestive or tempting, however, projection from the medieval situation onto late antiquity is best exercised with extreme caution—especially when dealing with this liminal “Age of Transition.” My own sense is that developments in the late Roman and Byzantine periods provided fertile soil for the (re)establishment of increased priestly prerogative in the world of Islam, a transition that was given resonance through Islamic interest in lineage.

I have argued against jumping too quickly from liturgical evidence to social history, particularly in a period where our knowledge is really so slight. That historians who are often so eager to discount both E. R. Goodenough’s ancient Reform Jews<sup>57</sup> and extensive rabbinic influence in late antique synagogues are also quick to embrace a theory built on such slight foundations is surprising, though I argue elsewhere that this has much to do with contemporary religious ideologies and a desire to use history (and particularly archaeology) as a vehicle for lessening the grip of clerical authority. This use of archaeology in the construction of a counterhistory of Judaism parallels approaches applied in the study of early Christian art—with results that are similarly difficult to accept.<sup>58</sup> A better explanation for the prominence of priestliness in Byzantine Palestine is to be found in the realm of religious sensibilities and liturgy. In a culture focused upon Scripture, living among non-Jews who themselves were interested in priestly issues, Jews increasingly lionized the lost Temple and its priests based upon patterns as old as the Pentateuch itself. In the process of sanctifying the synagogue as a “holy place,” loosely conceived, if only metaphorically, in light of the Tabernacle/Temple, the Jerusalem temple and its officiants were afforded greater conceptual prominence, if not necessarily social prominence, within synagogue life. This late antique situation certainly set the stage for the increased status of the priests as a hereditary elite during the Islamic period. This increase seems to have been a later development, however, supported—if not influenced—by Islamic concerns for lineage. That said, there is no positive evidence for the increased status of priests in the synagogues of Byzantine Palestine.

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<sup>57</sup> See Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 36–46.

<sup>58</sup> Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 28–30.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE MENORAH AND THE CROSS: HISTORIOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS ON A RECENT DISCOVERY FROM LAODICEA ON THE LYCUS



Figure 55. Column drum fragment inscribed with a menorah and a superimposed cross, Laodicea (courtesy of [www.HolyLandPhotos.org](http://www.HolyLandPhotos.org)).

The origins of this essay lie in a visit in 2007 to the city of Laodicea on the Lycus, in what was once Phrygia, in modern Turkey. A colleague, the intrepid Mark Wilson of the Asia Minor Research Center, now in Antalya, directed me to a pile of column fragments west of the Roman *cardo*, where he told me I would find a fragment with a cross and a menorah. Eventually, I found the pile—which has since become a standard stop on the Christian tourism/pilgrimage route—and with great excitement the column. This fragment, which was published in a brief note by the excavator, Celal Şimşek, in 2006, was discovered in the ruins of Nymphaeum A at Laodicea, “to the north side of the so-called Syrian Road,” a building

destroyed in an earthquake in 494 CE.<sup>1</sup> The presence of a menorah in the nymphaeum compound at the very center of the city did not surprise me. After all, numerous roughly inscribed menorahs were found in the *Sebastion* of Aphrodisias from late antiquity, a period during which the erstwhile emperor temple compound was subdivided into shops.<sup>2</sup> Similar rough menorahs were found in the shops adjacent to the Sardis synagogue (also a building in the city center),<sup>3</sup> on a reused marble slab found in the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, and adorning tombs—including some in nearby Hierapolis (Pamukkale)—at numerous other sites.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, perhaps this well-carved column fragment derived from some lost Jewish communal building—perhaps a synagogue.

The image of the menorah on this column fragment, flanked on the left by a *shofar*, a ram's horn, and on the right by a palm frond or *lulav*, was a well-known visual trope in Jewish art across the empire,<sup>5</sup> but our piece is distinguished by the fact that this is the first archaeological evidence published for the Jewish community of Laodicea.<sup>6</sup> The form of the menorah is also typical, though the portrayal of flames as short irregular lines above the branches is less common. Although no traces of pigment remain on this object, I wonder if the flames might have been colored differently than the rest of the lamp, though this is probably pushing very standard iconography.<sup>7</sup> The angular shofar is typical of portrayals of ram's horns from Asia Minor.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Celal Şimşek, "A Menorah with a Cross Carved on a Column of Nymphaeum A at Laodicea Ad Lycum," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 91, no. 1 (2006): 342.

<sup>2</sup> Joyce M. Reynolds and Robert F. Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary: Texts from the Excavations at Aphrodisias Conducted by Kenan T. Erim* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987); Angelos Chanitotis, "Godfearers in the City of Love," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 36, no. 3 (2010): 34–44, 77; eadem, "The Conversion of the Temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Context," in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 243–273.

<sup>3</sup> John S. Crawford, "Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in Late-Antique Sardis," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 174–189.

<sup>4</sup> See *IJO Kleinasien*, 151, 398–440, and the bibliography there.

<sup>5</sup> See Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum*.

<sup>6</sup> On the history of the Jewish community at Laodicea, see Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14, 17, 31, 101–103, 198. Şimşek tells me that "[w]e have found only one menorah at the Laodikeia excavations yet, but we found a lot of Jewish inscriptions" (e-mail message to author, October 13, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Şimşek informs me that "[t]here wasn't any evidence of plaster or coloration within the menorah or the cross" (e-mail message to author, August 18, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Steven Fine and Leonard V. Rutgers, "New Light on Judaism in Asia Minor during Late Antiquity: Two Recently Identified Inscribed Menorahs," *Jewish Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1996): 1–23.

What makes this portrayal unique, however, is the very large cross that is superimposed upon the upper branches of the menorah, the round base of which is deeply gouged over the upper branches of the menorah. The cross—asymmetrical and carelessly carved—is nonetheless a much stronger image than the menorah. Its lines were carved widely and deeply with a far more secure hand than the compositionally more complex menorah below. This column is an excellent example of the ways that each of these communities created symbols for themselves in the Roman world. For the Jews, a symbol drawn from the Jerusalem Temple cult; for the Christians, a memory of the crucifixion; for both, a simple vertical and highly linear cipher that expresses something about each community in shorthand. Here they were, expressing the same formal vocabulary, one superimposed upon the other. My immediate reaction was that before me was the “smoking gun,” the iconographic evidence for the process of Christianizing the physical environment of the empire that included the destruction and appropriation of polytheistic and Jewish sacred spaces.

I was, of course, well aware of the archaeological and literary evidence for the transformation of synagogue sites, and in 1999 wrote about evidence for the Christian destruction of synagogues in late antique Palestine.<sup>9</sup> Archaeological evidence from diaspora synagogues has been discovered at Ilici (modern Elche) in Spain, at Stobi in Macedonia, and at Gerasa in Jordan.<sup>10</sup> At Ilici and Stobi, the synagogues were transformed into churches, while in Gerasa the site was razed and a church built in its stead. Destruction of synagogues by fire, as at Ein Gedi and perhaps Caesarea Maritima and Huseifa on Mount Carmel, has been ascribed to Christians<sup>11</sup>—though the malicious destruction of a Huseifa synagogue

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<sup>9</sup> Fine, “Non-Jews in the Synagogues of Palestine: Rabbinic and Archaeological Perspectives,” 224–241.

<sup>10</sup> The most complete discussion and bibliography on Ilici appears in David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1:241–247. On Stobi, see Dean L. Moe, “The Cross and the Menorah,” *Archaeology* 30 (1977): 148–157. On Gerasa, see John W. Crowfoot, “The Christian Churches,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. H. Kraeling (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 234–241.

<sup>11</sup> Dan Barag, Yosef Porat, and Ehud Netzer, “The Synagogue at ‘En-Gedi,” in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 116–119. Michael Avi-Yonah notes that “the evidence even included particles of sulfur.” Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History of Palestine from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 251. On Huseifa, see Michael Avi-Yonah and Na’im Makhouly, “A Sixth Century Synagogue at ‘Isfiya,” *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* 3 (1933): 118–131.

is mentioned in a liturgical poem.<sup>12</sup> More significantly, Roman legal and patristic sources provide dozens of examples relating to the destruction and conversion of synagogues for Christian purposes. Still, here was an explicit and visually compelling image of the process of Christianization—an image that I had long assumed must exist.

The placement of the cross above the menorah parallels a standard late antique Christian practice in dealing with Roman “paganism.” The addition of crosses, often directly upon or above “pagan” images, is well documented. This Christianization often had deep ideological significance. One example of this practice is the destroyed image of Mithras and the bull from a natural cave relief in Doliche in eastern Asia Minor.<sup>13</sup> Here too, a cross, apparently representing the church triumphant, is carved above the mutilated sculpture, and other crosses appear as well. Closer to Laodicea, the Temple of Artemis at Sardis is covered with similarly carved crosses (Figure 56). At Ephesus, crosses were added in a very public way to the forehead of Augustus, transforming the emperor into a Christian penitent (Figure 57).<sup>14</sup> There is thus nothing surprising about the Laodicea column. It was perversely exciting, nonetheless, to finally see it!

Few processes in late antiquity are better documented than the steps by which the Christian empire—ostensibly led, prodded, and cajoled by its most ideological elements—destroyed, appropriated, and transformed the architectural face of the Mediterranean world, at first *post factum* and then *a priori*. Roman legal sources, triumphalistic—and often hagiographic—patristic sources in four languages,<sup>15</sup> archaeological remains strewn from

<sup>12</sup> Discussed above, p. 135; Fine, “Non-Jews in the Synagogues of Palestine,” 235.

<sup>13</sup> Eberhard Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World* (London: Tempus, 2003), pl. 9.

<sup>14</sup> The sculptures are currently at the Ephesus Museum. Many thanks to Mark Wilson for bringing them to my attention. Helen Saradi suggests that “another means of incorporating the pagan past into the Christian world was to carve the sign of the cross on the forehead of statues, in particular those of Roman emperors. It has been shown that the cross on the forehead stood for the *sphragis*, directly related to the baptism. Thus these statues were Christianized and the represented persons were included among the Christians. This use of the cross was positive and it was not meant to indicate that the statues were ‘neutralized.’ The fact that in particular statues of members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty received the cross on the forehead takes on a special significance. It probably indicates that they had been chosen by God to become part of his divine plan, since Christ came to earth during that dynastic rule.” Saradi, “The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3, no. 4 (1997): 403–404.

<sup>15</sup> While many of the specific instances of Christian destruction are clearly dramatic inventions and stock *typoi* of Christian hagiographic literature, these texts reflect and provide broader ideological support for actual Christian destruction.





Figure 56. Christian graffiti in the Temple of Artemis at Sardis (photograph by Mark Wilson).



Figure 57. Sculpture of Augustus with a cross superimposed on his forehead, Ephesus Museum (photograph by Mark Wilson).

England to Arabia, occasionally Roman authors like Libanius, and even a Hebrew liturgical poem point to this process. James Parkes's masterpiece, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (London: Soncino Press, 1934)—a book written in response to rising European anti-Semitism (and, notably, published by the Jewish Soncino Press, and not by a general publisher)—provides the most comprehensive description of what can only be called an assault upon the synagogue in late antiquity. Energized by the Laodicea column fragment, I went looking for more recent discussions of the destruction of polytheistic and Jewish sites.

Over the last century, astonishingly little has been written that focuses upon the destruction of “pagan” art in late antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Only recently have classical art historians—often with the sense of being themselves the personally aggrieved parties—focused upon this phenomenon. Most prominent among these are Eberhard Sauer in his *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World* (London: Tempus Publishing, 2003),<sup>17</sup> and John Pollini, who for the first time examined the damage done to the most iconic (and studied) of all classical buildings, the Parthenon.<sup>18</sup>

“Late Antiquity” scholars have been astonishingly quiet on this subject. Kurt Weitzmann's monumental 1979 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition, *The Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*,<sup>19</sup> intentionally made no mention of this less happy side of late antique “spirituality,” eliding the catastrophe that was already

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<sup>16</sup> On the problematic of the terms “pagan” and “polytheists,” see Michele R. Salzman, “Pagans and Christians,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186–189.

<sup>17</sup> See also Eberhard Sauer, “Bursts of Destruction: Regional Variations in Iconoclasm in the Ancient and Late Antique World,” *Iconoclasm. Proceedings of a Conference at Oslo, 5–6 November 2009*, ed. Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac-Lindhagen, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> John Pollini, “Christian Destruction and Mutilation of the Parthenon,” *Athenische Mitteilungen* 122 (2007): 207–228; eadem, “Gods and Emperors in the East: Images of Power and the Power of Intolerance,” in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near East: Reflections on Culture, Ideology and Power*, ed. Yaron Z. Eliav, Elise A. Friedland, and Sharon Herbert (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 165–195; eadem, “The Archaeology of Destruction: Christians, Images of Classical Antiquity, and Some Problems of Interpretation,” in *The Archaeology of Violence: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Sarah Ralph (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 241–265. Pollini is currently preparing a monograph entitled *Christian Destruction and Desecration of Images of Classical Antiquity: A Study in Religious Intolerance in the Ancient World*.

<sup>19</sup> Kurt Weitzmann, ed., *The Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*. For Weitzmann's perspective on this exhibition, see his *Sailing with Byzantium from Europe to America: The Memoirs of an Art Historian* (Munich: Editio

being visited upon “polytheistic,” Jewish, and non-Orthodox Christian culture. The exhibition was unproblematically divided into five sections: “The Imperial Realm,” “The Classical Realm,” “The Secular Realm,” “The Jewish Realm,” and finally “The Christian Realm.”<sup>20</sup> Margaret Olin has shown that Weitzmann’s approach was not mere academic blindness, but it was prescriptive. Weitzmann projected happy postwar America into antiquity in response to his own wartime experiences. He traced his interest in relationships between Jewish and Christian art to a seminar on Dura taught by the venerable Berlin art historian Hans Lietzmann in 1933–1934, soon after Hitler came to power. This theme was apparently chosen by Lietzmann as an act of resistance against Nazism. As a student of the (baptized) Jewish art historian Adolph Goldschmidt, Weitzmann found himself unemployable in Germany without a course of Nazification. He therefore left for Princeton, where he developed his prewar interests and continued to imagine—and project—a Weimar-like multicultural Dura Europos. It is not insignificant that *The Age of Spirituality* presents an undisturbed “Jewish Realm,” nor that this section of the exhibition was curated by Israeli art historian (and Weitzmann acolyte) Bezalel Narkiss.<sup>21</sup>

The “Late Antiquity,” movement, with Peter Brown as *pater familias*, having developed so recently out of patristic studies, still maintains an astonishing empathy toward the Christianization of the Roman Empire.<sup>22</sup> This transformation—by the description of the Fathers themselves, one of the most brutal in human history—is sometimes taken as a natural—often laudatory—element of the Christianization of the empire. *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century AD*, a 2011–2012 exhibition at the Onassis Cultural Center, New York, for example, which is deeply indebted to Brown’s work, makes this point vividly.<sup>23</sup> This

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Maris, 1994), 429–444. See also Olin, *The Nation Without Art*, 127–156; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 5–59, 130–131, 172–183.

<sup>20</sup> Robin M. Jensen comments on the enduring significance of this exhibition in “Material Evidence (2), Visual Culture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109–110.

<sup>21</sup> Olin, *The Nation Without Art*, 139–146; Bezalel Narkiss, “My Path Through Art,” trans. D. Sax, posted on the website of the *Center for Jewish Art*, <http://cja.huji.ac.il/Narkiss/MY%20PATH%20THROUGH%20ART.html> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>22</sup> See Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31–54, and my review of Hagith Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, *Review of Biblical Literature*, October 17, 2009, <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=7178&CodePage=7178>.

<sup>23</sup> December 7, 2011–May 14, 2012.

exhibition, together with Brown's introductory essay to the catalog, plays down the brutal nature of this "transition," treating it as an almost consensual process.<sup>24</sup> One exhibition label, for example, describes the addition of a cross to the forehead of Aphrodite as the act of "zealots," and not for what it was, a state-sponsored "transition."<sup>25</sup> This message was even expressed through exhibition lighting. While lighting in the halls representing pre-Christian religion was somewhat subdued, the lights illuminating Christian triumph were brightly aglow. A recent collection entitled *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (London, 2006), for example, mainly focuses upon violence toward Christians and has little to say about violence committed by Christians.<sup>26</sup> Michael Gaddis's *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, published in Brown's "The Transformation of the Classical Heritage" series,<sup>27</sup> is the first monograph of this school to focus upon patristic violence and is an important step. Perhaps not surprisingly, the first colloquium on Christian destruction was held in Germany, a country where reflection on religious intolerance, particularly after *Kristallnacht*, is part of the national ethos. It was held at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in 2002, and the proceedings were published by organizers Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter in 2008 as *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*.<sup>28</sup> This volume assembles studies that reflect great subtlety in their use of literary and archaeological sources, with opinions ranging from Roger Bagnall's self-described "positivist" and deeply anti-lachrymose approach to archaeological evidence for the Christianization of Egypt to David Frankfurter's cautious search for "historical kernels" in

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<sup>24</sup> Peter L. Brown, "Introduction: Late Antiquity: Anomaly and Order between a Pagan and Christian World," in *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century AD*, ed. A. Lazaridou (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2011), 21–25.

<sup>25</sup> *Transition to Christianity*, 146, 8. On Brown's historiography, particularly the question of "transitions," see Edward James, "The Rise and Function of the Concept 'Late Antiquity,'" *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 20–30.

<sup>26</sup> Harold A. Drake, *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (London: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

patristic sources that do not find their way into the kinds of legal papyri and imperial narratives that Bagnall favors.<sup>29</sup>

Trends in the larger academy are apparent in Jewish studies, though with the particular charge relating to Emancipation and its most recent stage, Americanization. Scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, most prominently historian Heinrich Graetz, focused deeply upon the Christian destruction of Jewish monuments and buildings, building upon a deep-seated Jewish sense of aggrievement toward Christianity and using that historical evidence in the contemporary battle for emancipation.<sup>30</sup> Writing in New York beginning in 1927, the Austro-Hungarian immigrant scholar Salo Wittmayer Baron moved to bracket and balance negative aspects of Jewish history—especially in premodern times—and focus upon Jewish social and economic power,<sup>31</sup> a narrative that suited his upwardly mobile first-generation Americanizing Jewish audience well (and was first given public expression in a popular literary journal directed toward this group in 1928—perhaps one of the least lachrymose moments in all of Jewish history).<sup>32</sup> To do this, he branded his predecessors as proponents of “the lachrymose history of the Jews,” as opposed to his own community-focused search for a new and rebalanced American consensus in his three-volume *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937). The hugely expanded second edition, which appeared in eighteen volumes between 1952 and 1983,<sup>33</sup> was rightly described by Baron student and acolyte Ismar Schorsch as an anti-lachrymose response

<sup>29</sup> Roger S. Bagnall, “Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Roman Egypt,” in *From Temple to Church*, 23–41; David Frankfurter, “Iconoclasm and Christianization in Late Antique Egypt: Christian Treatments of Space and Image,” in *From Temple to Church*, 135–159. In addition, see Sauer’s evaluation of Bagnall’s work in *The Archaeology of Religious Hate*, 106–113.

<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart: Aus den Quellen neu bearbeitet* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1908), 4:354–367; Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 51–70, 151–367; Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 77–117.

<sup>31</sup> This approach was first presented in his “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 2 (1928): 515–526. See Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 39–51; Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, 376–388.

<sup>32</sup> See Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron*, 14–15. I focus on this moment in terms of New York public Jewish architecture in the preface to the revised edition of Fine, *Art and Judaism*, xv–xviii.

<sup>33</sup> Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952–1983).

to “the noxious fumes of the Holocaust.”<sup>34</sup> In the section ominously titled “Incipient Medievalism,” Baron goes to incredible lengths to illustrate his anti-lachrymose approach within a late antique context. Here, Baron draws upon resources almost entirely from patristic polemics against synagogues and particularly against Christian participation in synagogue rituals, reading them against the grain in search of positive interactions with Jews and Judaism. I cite some of his more poignant comments:

More remarkably still, even the Christian masses got along very well with their Jewish neighbors. . . . Many Christians continued to attend synagogues particularly on Saturdays. So widespread was the reverence for the Jewish Sabbath in Christian circles that the strongly anti-Jewish Council of Laodicea had to concede them the right of reading in their churches from “the Gospels and other portions of the Scripture” on that day.<sup>35</sup>

Much of this friendliness, to be sure, already had a suspicious coloring. It foreshadowed, in part, a growing belief among medieval Christians that the Jew is endowed with superior powers of healing and blessing crops because of his intimate association with demons. . . . These normally friendly masses were, nevertheless, easily swayed by a rabble-rousing preacher or any unsubstantiated rumor to attack Jews and synagogues. Burning of Jewish houses of worship and their conversion into churches became a frequent occurrence. Mobs and their ecclesiastical leaders effectively defied the imperial will, expressed in an endless reiteration of protective laws for synagogue property.<sup>36</sup>

The anti-lachrymose approach adopted by Baron, with this tinge of special pleading, attributed far greater significance to the happier sides of late antiquity and paralleled the Holocaust response that underlies Weitzmann’s approach to things Jewish. Baron played down the Christian destruction of Jewish and pagan sites and ascribed it to “rabble-rousing” churchmen, adopting as his own the positions expressed by late antique imperial legal codes, texts that maintained their own internal and deeply conservative legal logic even as historical situations changed.

Between the lines of Baron’s narrative, one may sense the gulf that often separated the Church’s official anti-Jewish hostility before the Second Vatican Council and the far warmer relations that frequently existed between Catholics and Jews on the local level—particularly in

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<sup>34</sup> Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, 2, 386.

<sup>35</sup> Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 2nd ed., 2:188.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:189.



America but also in Baron's native Austria-Hungary.<sup>37</sup> It is astonishing that a recent 748-page study of the ancient synagogue, published by a student of Baron's school, mentions synagogue destructions only briefly;<sup>38</sup> the narrative of Christian destruction receiving a "walk-on" role is a fine example of anti-lachrymose scholarship.<sup>39</sup> The "obviousness" of this stance was such that it did not even occur to me, a young student of Baron's student, to include synagogue destruction in my 1996 exhibition, *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, a project that, from its earliest planning stages, beginning in 1990, I intentionally modeled on *The Age of Spirituality*. On the other hand, to include it might have diminished funding options, for the 1990s were a particularly happy period in American culture.

Scholarship on early Christianity has shown particular concern for the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first centuries. The steps by which these communities separated have been of particular interest, particularly surrounding the question of "Jewish Christianity." Central to this conversation was French scholar Marcel Simon, who identified a small group of objects that seem to pair Jewish and Christian iconography as "Jewish Christian."<sup>40</sup> More recently, much scholarship in North America and in Israel has focused upon interpenetration of Jews and Christians, a search for *The Ways That Never Parted*,<sup>41</sup> that is, the religious culture shared by Christians and Jews in antiquity. My

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<sup>37</sup> For parallel evaluations of Baron's apologetic, see Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 238–239; David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 29–84.

<sup>38</sup> Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 210–211.

<sup>39</sup> Yoram Bronowski captured the strongly American tone of Levine's oeuvre, describing his *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999) as "a quiet song of praise (*shir hallel*)... to this blending (*mizzug*) [of Judaism and Hellenism]." See Y. Bronowski, "Yafet be-Ohalo shel Shem" [Hebrew: Japheth in the Tent of Shem], *Haaretz*, April 24, 2000, B-14.

<sup>40</sup> Marcel Simon, "Le chandelier à sept branches—symbole chrétien?," *Recherches d'histoire judéo-chrétienne* (Paris: Moulton, 1962), 181–187; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 158. See my review of Karen B. Stern, *Inscribing Devotion and Death: Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Populations of North Africa, Review of Biblical Literature*, February 2, 2009, <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=6370> (accessed May 2012).

<sup>41</sup> See Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); and the comments of Andrew S. Jacobs, "Jews and Christians," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 169–172. See Adiel Schremer's trenchant comments regarding the theological underpinnings of this formulation in his *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 98, and

own sense is that while Jews and Christians—like, for example, Jews and Samaritans—certainly shared a broad late antique culture, this approach often plays down the power discrepancy between the Jewish minority and the theologically supersessionist, and at times violent, Christian Empire, incorrectly treating Jews and Christians as rhetorical equals.<sup>42</sup> The over-focus on the liminality of borders between these communities (what we now call “hybridization”) parallels and offers historical resonance to elements of contemporary Jewish acculturation, liberal Christian secularization, and the de-hyphenization of the Jewish-Christian relationship in contemporary America, a phenomenon well expressed in high rates of marriage between these groups.<sup>43</sup> Şimşek, the excavator of Laodicea, interprets our column within the seemingly endless (and largely futile) search for archaeological evidence of Judeo-Christianity and a peaceable

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especially n. 50. See also Leonard V. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), esp. 79–115.

Scholars working in Israel are often responding to somewhat different stimuli. Good examples are Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, whose study of Jewish violence represents his explicit response to what he perceives as the use of “reckless” power in dealing with the Palestinians; and I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), whose work responds to the deep focus upon lachrymosity among Israeli medievalists of previous generations, most prominently Yitzhak Baer. To my mind, Yuval (like Boyarin, *Border Lines*) overcompensates in asserting excessive Jewish dependence upon Christianity in the pre-Constantinian era. See also Funkenstein, “Jewish History among the Thorns,” 320.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Boyarin, *Border Lines*, a volume that has been highly influential in Christian circles and has been less well received by most historians of Judaism during this period. See, most significantly, Stuart S. Miller, “The First True Religion,” *Jerusalem Report*, October 3, 2005, 38–40; eadem, “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche’s ‘Judaean-Palestina,’ Schwartz’s *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, and Boyarin’s *Border Lines* Reconsidered.” This approach underlies, for example, Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 5–6. See also my reviews of Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, and of Stern, *Inscribing Devotion*. An excellent model of balance regarding Christian colonial constructions of Jews and Judaism in late antique Palestine is Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

The shifting of power relationships, particularly with the Persian and Islamic invasions of Palestine in the seventh century, though perhaps also in the time of Julian, seems to have resulted in Jewish violence against Christians. See Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 83; Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 228–247. For archaeological evidence of a massacre of Christians during the Persian invasion of 614, see Ronny Reich, “‘God Knows Their Names’: Mass Christian Grave Revealed in Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22, no. 2 (1996): 26–33, 60; Gideon Avni, “The Persian Conquest of Jerusalem (614 CE)—An Archaeological Assessment,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 357 (2010): 35–48.

<sup>43</sup> The literature on exogamous marriage among Jews is vast. For an example of a thoughtful study, see Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).



Abb. 582. Siebenarmiger Leuchter aus der grossen Kirche.

Figure 58. Menorah plaque from the Priene Basilica. The German caption below translates: “Seven-armed candelabrum from the large church” (after Theodor Wiegand and Hans Schrader, *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898* [Berlin, 1904], 481).

antiquity: “The fact that these two motifs are virtually united may point to the presence of Jewish Christians in the town and suggest that the two groups co-existed peacefully.”<sup>44</sup>

In the early 1990s, I did not pay much attention to the fact that the marble menorah plaque discovered at Priene in the *Grossenkirchen* and published in 1892 was found in the church (Figure 58).<sup>45</sup> The iconography of the menorah—spirals beneath each branch, palm frond and citron to its left, and a shofar to its right—is clearly Jewish and fits with the other menorahs with curls from Nicaea, Sardis, and now Andriake in Lycia (Figure 59).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Şimşek, “A Menorah with a Cross Carved,” 346.

<sup>45</sup> Theodor Wiegand and Hans Schrader, *Priene: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895–1898* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1904), 481.

<sup>46</sup> Fine and Rutgers, “New Light on Judaism in Asia Minor,” 1–23; Marcus Rautman, “Two Menorahs from the Synagogue at Sardis” [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 43, no. 139 (2010):



Figure 59. Menorah panel discovered in the synagogue of Andriake (courtesy of Nevzat Çevik).

This is not a Christian menorah.<sup>47</sup> I cannot help but (unfairly?) wonder why it was not discovered in the synagogue (which Sukenik suggests was its source),<sup>48</sup> a far more modest building of local stone, where no menorah of this elegance was found. Was this beautiful plaque taken from the synagogue—or perhaps from another local synagogue that has not been discovered—or did the Christians simply buy the stone? Was it displayed in the church, perhaps as a kind of booty? The final report, published in 1904, does not state whether the stone was displayed, though the most recent scholar to study the basilica, Stephan Westphalen, tells me that “[t]he menorah plaque was reused as a spolia in the floor of the Byzantine basilica.”<sup>49</sup>

Recently, Michele Murray has somewhat tentatively suggested a more positive take on the presence of this rather monumental marble plaque (measuring 60 × 61.5 cm<sup>50</sup>) within the large church at Priene. She writes:

Another option that ought to be considered is that the display of the menorah in the church was motivated by a *positive* attitude towards Judaism. Displaying the menorah in the church would then be an expression of appreciation or even attraction towards Judaism. There is plentiful literary evidence for such attraction in earlier Christian literature from Asia Minor. . . . The fourth-century council held by Anatolian bishops in the Asia Minor city of Laodicea issued canons that oppose a very real Christian interest in Judaism, such as attending Jewish festivals, observing the [*sic*] Sabbath, participating in Passover Seders [*sic*], and other activities. . . . Within Asia Minor, there is evidence for Christian interconnection with and attraction to Judaism and for a certain fluidity in Jewish-Christian boundaries and identity. The possibility that the discovery of the menorah in the church (a structure admittedly dated slightly later than much of the literature just cited) might reflect a pro-Jewish attitude on the part of the Christian community of Priene cannot be dismissed out of hand.<sup>51</sup>

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44–48; Çevik, Çömezoğlu, Öztürk, and Türkoğlu, “A Unique Discovery in Lycia: The Ancient Synagogue at Andrake, Port of Myra,” 342–344, 363–365.

<sup>47</sup> See Hachlili, *The Menorah*, 271–272; and Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, 43; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> E-mail message, August 3, 2010. On the basilica generally, see Stephan Westphalen, “Die Basilika von Priene. Architektur und liturgische Ausstattung,” *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 48 (1998): 279–340; eadem, “The Byzantine Basilica at Priene. A Fieldwork Report,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000): 275–280.

<sup>50</sup> Fine, *Sacred Realm*, 161.

<sup>51</sup> Michele Murray, “Down the Road from Sardis: Adaptive Religious Structures and Religious Interaction in the Ancient City of Priene,” in *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna*, ed. R. S. Ascough (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), 209.



For Murray, the presence of the menorah plaque in the large church has become an ecumenical statement. The sources she cited (Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus) stem from the second century, and not from the fourth and fifth, when Christian sources, most vociferously John Chrysostom in Antioch, struggled with considerable vituperation to limit Christian involvement with Judaism—a far from ecumenical spirit.<sup>52</sup> The basilica at Priene was not the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City—to choose but one particularly poignant modern example—where the altar is flanked by two large seven-branched menorahs, donated in 1930 by *New York Times* publisher and son-in-law of Isaac Meyer Wise,<sup>53</sup> Adolph S. Ochs. Ochs saw this gift, which was given during the same year that Salo Baron became the first incumbent of the Miller Chair in Jewish History at the adjacent Columbia University, as a momentous step forward for Jewish-Christian relations. The cathedral dean agreed, explaining that the menorahs were “symbols of the debt owed by Christianity to Judaism.”<sup>54</sup> This goodwill certainly resonates with Murray’s desire for an ecumenical explanation for the presence of the Priene menorah plaque in the basilica.<sup>55</sup>

When ancient Christians did include seven-branched lampstands in churches, it was for strictly Christian reasons. Beginning with Eusebius of Caesarea, themes drawn from the Temple in Jerusalem were attached to the construction and furnishings of churches. By the eighth century (and probably long before), seven-branched lampstands could be seen on the altars of churches.<sup>56</sup> These Christian lampstands seldom shared an iconographic source with Jewish menorahs, but rather reflect an independent visual tradition. There is no evidence that the Christian leadership in late

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<sup>52</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). See now Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 24–45.

<sup>53</sup> Wise was the founder of American Reform Judaism.

<sup>54</sup> “Saint John’s Installs Twin Menorahs: Seven-Branched Lights, As in Solomon’s Temple, Used for First Time in a Cathedral,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 1930. Note also the comments of Conservative rabbi Israel Goldstein (op. cit.), whose comments span the cultural space shared by Baron’s historiography and this donation: “The presentation and acceptance of the gift represents an outstanding demonstration of genuine fellowship and good-will between Jew and Christian in America. It is, moreover, a demonstration of Americanism of the highest order. I doubt if it could have happened in any other country in the world, for nowhere else has the sense of fellowship between Jew and Christian flowered so magnificently.”

<sup>55</sup> Fine and Rutgers, “New Light on Judaism in Asia Minor.”

<sup>56</sup> Peter Bloch, “Siebenarmige Leuchter in christlichen Kirchen,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 23 (1961): 55–190; eadem, “Seven-Branched Candelabra in Christian Churches,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 1 (1974): 44–49.



antiquity harbored a “pro-Jewish attitude,” and certainly not in ecclesiastical contexts. In fact, it should be remembered that other spolia in the Priene basilica were set in the floor for distinctly noncumenical reasons. Thus, Helen Saroda writes:

Spolia incorporated in churches could always point to the defeat of the old religion and glorify the new one. In this respect the *Life* of St. Porphyry by Mark the Deacon is explicit: since the decision was taken to build a church on the site of the Marneion, the saint ordered that the front yard be paved with slabs of marble from the most sacred part of the temple, so that people and animals would step on them. Such appears to have been the message conveyed by the spoils, including many inscriptions from the temple of Athene of Priene, built in the pavement of the city's large basilica.<sup>57</sup>

It seems that the Priene menorah plaque met a similar fate. In fact, the decisions of the mid-fourth-century Council of Laodicea, whose statues are adduced as proof by Murray and by Baron, reflect yet another attempt by a church hierarchy to stem fraternization.<sup>58</sup> They instruct, for example, that

Christians should not judaize and refrain from work on the Sabbath, but they should work on that day. As Christians, they should honor the day of the Lord, [and], as much as possible, refrain from work. If they are found out to be judaizers, let them be anathematized from Christ.<sup>59</sup>

Other canons forbid celebration of Jewish feasts, and the receipt of “unleavened bread from Jews” is particularly noted.<sup>60</sup> Is our menorah, a cross roughly superimposed upon it, a visual expression of a broader pattern whereby Christian cultural boundaries were asserted at Laodicea—in this case, to the distinct disadvantage of the local Jewish community?

The Laodicea column and my revised thinking about the Priene bas-relief bring me back to a marble ashlar from Iznik, ancient Nicaea, that Leonard V. Rutgers and I published in 1996 (Figure 60).<sup>61</sup> This artifact came to my attention in 1995 when a rabbi, formerly a U.S. Army chaplain

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<sup>57</sup> H. Saradi, “The Use of Ancient Spolia,” 401–403. Providing numerous other examples, Saradi goes on to note (p. 403) that “such a use of spolia in religious buildings, conveying the message of religious intolerance and victory over the defeated paganism, was not an unparalleled Christian practice: in the forecourt of Sardis's Jewish Synagogue a relief with Artemis and Cybele was placed upside down.”

<sup>58</sup> See F. J. Elizabeth Boddens Hosang, *Establishing Boundaries: Christian-Jewish Relations in Early Council Texts and the Writings of Church Fathers* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 91–107.

<sup>59</sup> Canon 29, trans. Boddens Hosang, *Establishing Boundaries*, 93.

<sup>60</sup> Canons 37, 38, trans. Boddens Hosang, *Establishing Boundaries*, 99.

<sup>61</sup> See above, n. 8, p. 196.

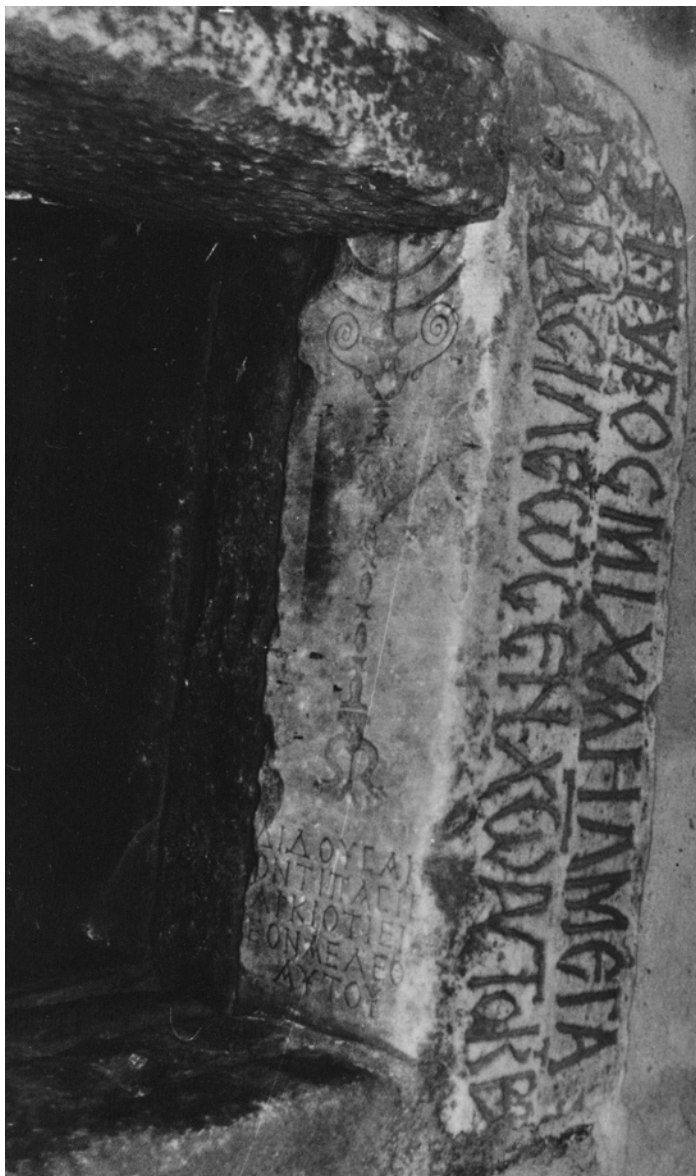


Figure 60. Ashlar with an inscribed menorah, Nicaea (photograph by Marvin Labinger).

in Turkey, brought me a slide of an exquisite menorah that had previously gone unnoticed. The Greek inscription below the menorah, a Jewish version of Psalm 136:25 (Psalm 135 in the Septuagint), was published in Berlin in 1943, with minor mention of the lampstand.<sup>62</sup> The place and date of publication may or may not be relevant; epigraphers often disregard the artifacts upon which their inscriptions appear. More important, though, is the fact that this large late antique artifact was reused, eventually as the lip of a rather large baptistery. It was reinscribed with a dedicatory inscription by King Michael III (842–867, who began a major building project in Nicaea in 857/8 CE), and the Jewish inscription was embedded in the city wall. What happened to the synagogue/Jewish public building of Nicaea that made this stone available for reuse? Was it abandoned and its stones purchased or salvaged? Was it destroyed by Christians, in this most theological of Byzantine cities? We shall never know, though the questions remain, especially in light of the Laodicea column.

Leaving behind these larger artifacts, evidence for the disfigurement of menorahs is more common in Asia Minor than I once thought. A number of the Aphrodesias menorahs, for example, were already scratched out in antiquity. The gable of a tombstone from ancient Trallis in Caria (modern Aydin) contains a rather typical menorah flanked by a palm frond and a shofar.<sup>63</sup> Here, too, the menorah was scratched out, apparently also in antiquity. We cannot know whether the Laodicea menorah remained visible under the cross—in which case it would have made a clear statement of erasure and supersession—or whether it might have been plastered over.<sup>64</sup>

To conclude: sometimes an artifact sparks rethinking and reimagining. For me, the Laodicea menorah/cross is one such object. We shall never know what happened in Laodicea that led to the column of a Jewish building—or at least, a building used by Jews—to be resignified in Christian terms. My own instinct, however, is to suspect the worst and to suggest that the kind

<sup>62</sup> Alfons M. Schneider, *Die römischen und byzantinischen Denkmäler von Iznik-Nicaea* (Berlin: n.p., 1943), 36, no. 68. See, most recently, Ameling, *IJO Kleinasien*, 322–324.

<sup>63</sup> The inscription is located in the garden of the Archaeological Museum of Aydin.

<sup>64</sup> I am reminded of a lintel discovered in the Western Wall excavations in Jerusalem. At the center of the lintel, Byzantine craftsmen carved a cross within a roundel. Sometime after the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614, the roundel was filled with plaster and two menorahs were painted in the ocher, flanking the now-erased cross. See Eilat Mazar, *The Temple Mount Excavations in Jerusalem, 1968–1978, Directed by Benjamin Mazar: Final Reports Vol. II: The Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods*, Qedem 43 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003), 163–186. I discuss this artifact in “The Parting of the Ways: From Melito to Mohammed,” forthcoming.

of social distancing given expression by the Council of Laodicea adversely affected the local late antique Jewish community, of which our column is the only published archaeological evidence. In this short excursus, I have used this remarkable discovery—which still lies in a pile of columns “to the north side of the so-called Syrian Road”—as a touchstone for a larger discussion of the ways that ideology has affected the interpretation of Jewish-Christian relations in late antiquity. My own interpretation is certainly rooted in the somewhat more “lachrymose” world post-9/11 in which we find ourselves; ever more distant from the “roaring twenties” in which Baron’s anti-lachrymose history of Judaism took root, from post-war America when Weitzmann’s happy “Age of Spirituality” expressed an American social ideal, and from the “carefree 1990s” in which my generation began our own professional careers<sup>65</sup>—each of these periods marked by its own distinct, yet now illusive, rhetoric of happy endings.

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<sup>65</sup> This is how the 1990s has occasionally been described in the press. See, for example, Catherine Saint Louis, “Target Touches Up Manhattan’s Makeup,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 2010, E-3.

CHAPTER TWELVE

JEWS AND JUDAISM UNDER *BYZANTIUM AND ISLAM*

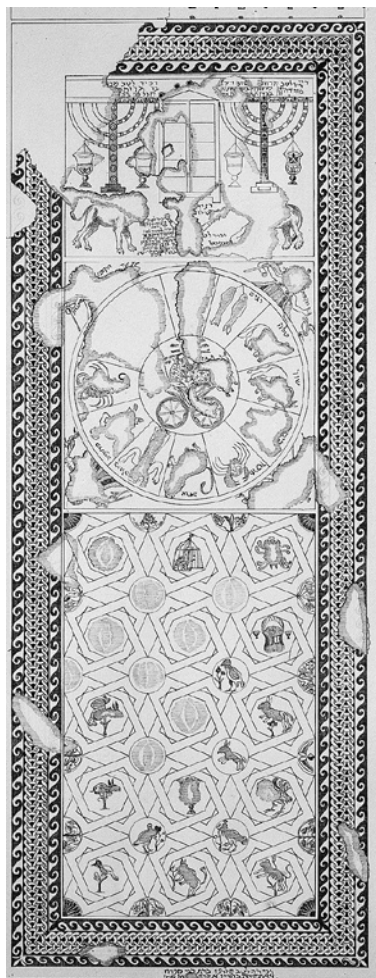


Figure 61a.

Figures 61a–b. Drawings of the Na'aran (Ein Duq) synagogue (after Louis-Hugues Vincent, “Un sanctuaire dans la région de Jericho, la synagogue de Na'arah,” *Revue Biblique* 68 [1961], pls. VI–VII).

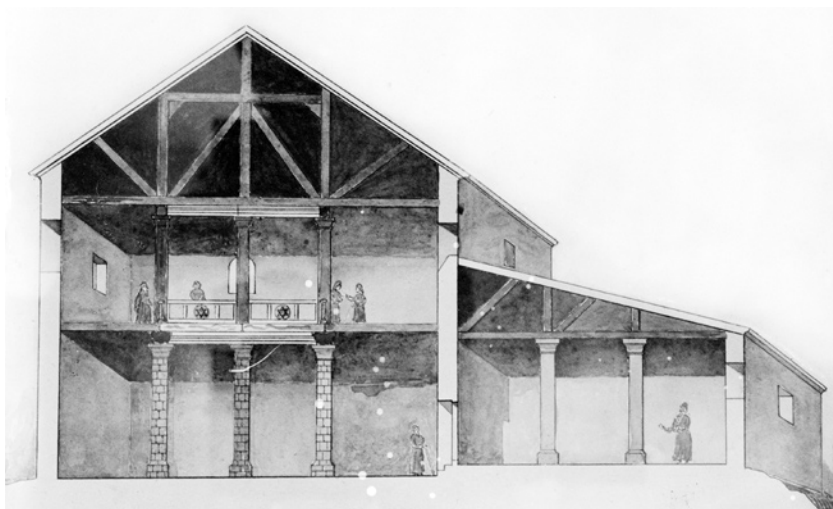


Figure 6lb.

In his famous compendium of biblical sites in the Holy Land, the great fourth-century church father Eusebius of Caesarea includes an entry for “Naarah ([mentioned in] Joshua 16:7). In the [region of the biblical] tribe of Ephraim. Noorath is now a village of Jews five miles from Jericho.”<sup>1</sup> The site, built on a bluff overlooking the Jordan River, was known to late antique Jews as Na’aran, and in more recent times was called Ayn Duq, the “Spring of Duq.” A beautiful synagogue mosaic of the fifth to sixth centuries was discovered there by New Zealanders in September 1918, when it was struck by an Austrian shell aimed at British military installations.<sup>2</sup> The synagogue of Na’aran is an excellent vantage point from which to view the transition of Jewish culture from the world of Christian Rome to the Islamic empire. This ancient floor epitomizes the ways that this minority

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture*, ed. and trans. S. Notley and Z. Safrai (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 130 and n. 732.

<sup>2</sup> Maitland Woods, “Palestine: Past and Present: Third Article,” *The Kia Ora Coe-Ee*, September 15, 1918, 7, <http://www.nzetc.org/etexts/ReiKaOr/ReiKaOr166.gif> (accessed May 2012); L. H. Vincent, “Un sanctuaire dans la region de Jericho, la synagogue de Na’arah,” *Revue Biblique* 68 (1961): 161–173; Pierre Benoit, “Note Additionnelle,” *Revue Biblique* 68 (1961): 174–177; Michael Avi-Yonah, “Na’aran,” in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 1075–1076; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 82–85. See most recently Werlin, “The Late Antique Synagogues of Southern Palestine,” 29–80.



culture was transformed by its encounter with Islam yet maintained deep continuities with Jewish culture under Rome and Byzantium.

The Na'aran synagogue was a rather typical rural basilica of its age, with a large courtyard, a broad narthex, a large central nave, and two side aisles. It was the same architecture used in contemporaneous rural churches, and from the outside it would be hard to distinguish it from a church—except perhaps if there had been a menorah rather than a cross, or perhaps a Hebrew inscription, on the (now lost) lintel above the main portal. At the focal point of the synagogue, there was likely a broad apse (also lost) within which stood a large Torah ark that may have been flanked by seven-branched menorahs. A richly patterned mosaic pavement decorated the entire floor, at the center of which was placed a large zodiac panel.

Zodiacs began to appear on synagogue floors during the late fourth or early fifth century and remained popular well into the sixth. In fact, they continued within Jewish contexts for centuries after they had fallen out of favor in larger society due to Christian hostility toward “pagan” zodiac imagery. Jews had no such qualms. This is likely owing to Judaism’s abiding interest in the heavens, both for the practical reason of constructing Jewish time (particularly the lunar-solar calendar and hence the dates of holidays) and relatedly, as the dwelling place of God and his divine court. These themes are well expressed throughout ancient Jewish literature—legal, homiletical (midrashic), and liturgical—of this period.<sup>3</sup>

Before the Torah shrine was a second mosaic panel, this one containing the image of a Torah ark, evoking the biblical ark of the covenant, flanked by seven-branched menorahs from which lamps were suspended for additional light—apparently a mirror image of the synagogue furnishings before which it was laid. Stone arks and large menorahs have been discovered at a number of locations. Images of Torah shrines and menorahs appear in both Jewish and Samaritan synagogue mosaics (Figure 62), in bas-reliefs and on ritual objects.

Most unusually, at Na'aran a man with his arms raised in prayer and flanked by lions appears below the ark. Statues and mosaic depictions of lions have been discovered that heraldically protected the *sancta*. Labeled “Daniel” in Hebrew, the man is the biblical Daniel, in the lion’s den. Biblical imagery is common on the floors of a number of synagogues, including

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<sup>3</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 198–207.



Figure 62. el-Hirbe Samaritan synagogue mosaic pavement (photograph by Steven Fine).

the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22), Aaron in the Tabernacle, Noah, Samson,<sup>4</sup> and Daniel in an *orans* position within the lion's den—an image that also appears on the base of a Torah shrine from the Golan Heights (Figures 63a–b). Daniel at Na'aran is illustrated in the place where the synagogue prayer leader might have stood. Rabbinic sources treat the biblical Daniel as the archetype for rabbinic prayer.<sup>5</sup>

The synagogue pavement at Na'aran, like those of most synagogues discovered in Palestine, was richly decorated with inscriptions composed in Jewish Aramaic, the spoken language of most rural Palestinian Jews during this period, Greek being more common in urban environments (Hebrew, which occurs occasionally, was by then mainly a literary and not a spoken language).<sup>6</sup> There was little difference between Jewish Aramaic, Samaritan Aramaic, and Palestinian Christian Aramaic. Jewish Aramaic, however, included many Hebrew loanwords and was composed in a script drawn from the letters of the Hebrew Bible that could only be read by Jews—just as Samaritan Hebrew and Aramaic were written in an ancient “paleo-” Hebrew script, dating to biblical times, that only Samaritans, the descendants of the northern tribes of biblical Israel whose religious

<sup>4</sup> Based upon Judg 15:1–5. Jodi Magness, “Samson in the Synagogue,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39, no. 1 (2013): 32–39, 66–67.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 191–198.

<sup>6</sup> Greenfield, “The Languages of Palestine.”



Figure 63a.



Figure 63b.

Figures 63a–b. Torah shrine base, En Samsam, Golan Heights (photographs by Steven Fine).

center was on Mount Gerizim, could read.<sup>7</sup> While script served to distinguish Jewish and Samaritan public spaces even in Roman times, by late antiquity the scripts used by these communities were deeply symbolic markers of identity—a model that was likely not lost on early Islam.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Samaritan population in Israel and the West Bank now numbers more than 700.

<sup>8</sup> On Samaritan synagogues, see Magen, “Samaritan Synagogues”; Pummer, “Samaritan Synagogues and Jewish Synagogues: Similarities and Differences.”

The inscriptions at Na'aran provide rich evidence of public benefaction by individuals within this rural community. Below are some examples:<sup>9</sup>

דכירה לטב חליפו ברת רבי ספרה דאתחזקת בהדין אתרה [קדי]שה אמן  
 [ד]כירין לטב כל מן [ד]מתחזק ויהב או [די]הב בהדין אתרה [ק]דישה בן דהב בן  
 [כ]סף בן כל מקמה [ד]היא [א]מן חו>ל<קהון בהדין אתרה קדישה אמן

Remembered for good is Ḥalifu, daughter of Rabbi Safra, who has supported this holy place, Amen.

Remembered for good each person who supports and contributes, or will [in the future] give in this holy place, whether gold, silver or anything else. Amen. Their portion is in this holy place. Amen.

Referring to the synagogue as a “holy place” reflects a long development that began even before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. The entire environment of the synagogue was designed to create a kind of sanctity derived from Scripture—and particularly involvement with the scrolls of the Pentateuch: the sanctity of Jewish time, of the holy nation, and of God as “the Holy One, Blessed be He.”<sup>10</sup> The design of the synagogue interior and even notions of synagogue sanctity developed in conversation with contemporary Christian forms, and drew inspiration from the religious architecture of the majority culture. One Christian writer, albeit a rather unsympathetic one, the rampaging monk Bar Sauma, accurately describes the brightness of light within a synagogue in Areopolis, biblical Rabbat Amon, in modern Jordan, and connects it to the Solomonic Temple:

ארכאולוג ג'ק ג'ון, בעל שבתא רפלא כוסבא אשכנזי אשכנזי: אל  
 א שאלא מאלא סא ג'ון אשכנזי מלכא כוסבא אשכנזי אשכנזי  
 אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי אשכנזי  
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Nowhere was there a synagogue equal to this one, other than the temple that Solomon himself built in Jerusalem. It was built with large and carefully hewn stones, encrusted with silver and gold and lit with golden chandeliers.<sup>11</sup>

The apses of numerous synagogues were enclosed with low fences drawn directly from Christian contexts, which, as we have discussed, were called

<sup>9</sup> Naveh, *On Mosaic and Stone*, 93–102, nos. 60, 64.

<sup>10</sup> The development of this conception is traced in Fine, *This Holy Place*. See also Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 210–211.

<sup>11</sup> François Nau, “Résumé de monographies syriaques,” *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 18 (1913): 382, translated in Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, 178. Many thanks to my Bin-yamin Goldstein and Serge Ruzer for their help in transcribing the Syriac.

“chancel screens.”<sup>12</sup> In Scythopolis, biblical Beth Shean and rabbinic *Beishan*, screens for synagogues and churches were made in the same workshops, a menorah added for a synagogue, a cross for a church. Where in the church, this screen separated the clergy from the laity, in the synagogue—where no similar hierarchy is known to have existed—it might have been explained as separating the higher “sanctity of the ark” from the lesser “sanctity of the synagogue [hall].” Significantly, the floors of the Beth Alpha synagogue and a Samaritan synagogue at Beit Shean just to the north of the city were both decorated with images of Torah arks and menorahs by the same father-son team. Even Christians occasionally used images of seven-branched lamps in burial contexts, on lamps, and on pilgrimage bottles—and by the ninth century, to illuminate the church, the new “tabernacle of God.”<sup>13</sup>

The synagogue of Na’aran was built at a time when Jewish synagogue construction was forbidden by Roman law, a prohibition that was not uniformly respected.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in the late fourth century, Imperial legislators were forced to intervene when particularly zealous Christian clergy and their followers destroyed or took over synagogues for their own use. While at first Jewish synagogues (though not Samaritan ones) were protected, these protections eroded over the centuries. Jews and Samaritans in Palestine were reasonably wealthy in the Christian holy land, benefiting economically from the wealth brought about through the Christian pilgrimage “industry.” Christians treated Jews with scorn, pilgrims sometimes treating the local Jews—and Samaritans (who together constituted the majority population)—as ethnographic specimens, the vestigial (if occasionally ornery) natives of Jesus’s past.<sup>15</sup> Evidence for legally sanctioned attacks on synagogues is plentiful, and it is thought that the synagogue at Ein Gedi to the south of Na’aran on the Dead Sea was burned by Christians.<sup>16</sup>

The Islamic invaders were seen by many Jews as nothing less than harbingers of the Messiah, rescuing them from the Bible-reading and deeply supercessionist Christian “pagans”—“the Evil Empire.” Though Jews did

<sup>12</sup> See above, pp. 126, 147–157.

<sup>13</sup> Bloch, “Siebenarmige Leuchter in christlichen Kirchen”; eadem, “Seven-Branded Candelabra in Christian Churches,” 46.

<sup>14</sup> Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987), 73–75.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*.

<sup>16</sup> See Fine, “Non-Jews in the Synagogues of Palestine: Rabbinic and Archaeological Perspectives.”

not join the Samaritans in revolting in 529, they reacted with messianic enthusiasm to the Sasanian invasion of Palestine in 614, apparently joining the Persians in burning numerous churches and massacring Christians in Jerusalem. The Persian defeat in 631 and the reassertion of Byzantine power seems to have led to massacres of Jews.<sup>17</sup>

The advent of Islamic rule brought on profound changes in Jewish life, though continuities between the Islamic period and the latter Byzantine were profound. On the local level, synagogues such as Na'aran were transformed through "iconoclastic" tinkering that brought the imagery of the synagogue into line with Muslim approaches to religious space. Thus, human and most animal images at Na'aran were removed from the mosaic with utmost care to preserve the pavement as a whole, while menorahs and inscriptions were untouched. The floor was retrofitted to the new aesthetic of the new umbrella civilization. Jewish interpretation of biblical prohibitions regarding idolatrous imagery, epitomized by the so-called "Second Commandment" of the Decalogue (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5), had often been quite broad in the late Roman and Byzantine period. With the coming of Islam, more stringent approaches prevailed.<sup>18</sup> Jews could thus differentiate themselves from the other "People of the Book," the other protected, though legally subject, *dhimmi* population, the Christians. The nearby eighth/ninth-century synagogue at Jericho (Figure 64), being near "Hisham's Palace," Khirbat al-Mafjar, reflects this transformation—as do illustrations that decorated Bible codices.<sup>19</sup> In the eighth-century Jericho synagogue, the image of the Torah ark is deeply geometrical and abstracted not unlike the image of an ark (be it the Torah shrine, the ark of the covenant, or likely, both at once), that appears in a ninth-century manuscript fragment discovered in Cairo, now in St. Petersburg—and

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9–10; Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 229–247.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Baumgarten, "Art in the Synagogue: Some Talmudic Views," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 96–206; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 108, and the bibliography cited there. See also G. W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 91–112; Noa Hacham-Yuval, "You Shall Not Make for Yourself any Graven Image': On Jewish Iconoclasm in Late Antiquity," *Ars Judaica* 6 (2010): 7–22; eadem, "Iconoclasm in Jewish Art in Late Antiquity" [Hebrew] (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Gideon Foerster, "The Synagogue at Tell es-Sultan," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 2:698–699; Werlin, "The Late Antique Synagogues of Southern Palestine," 81–108.



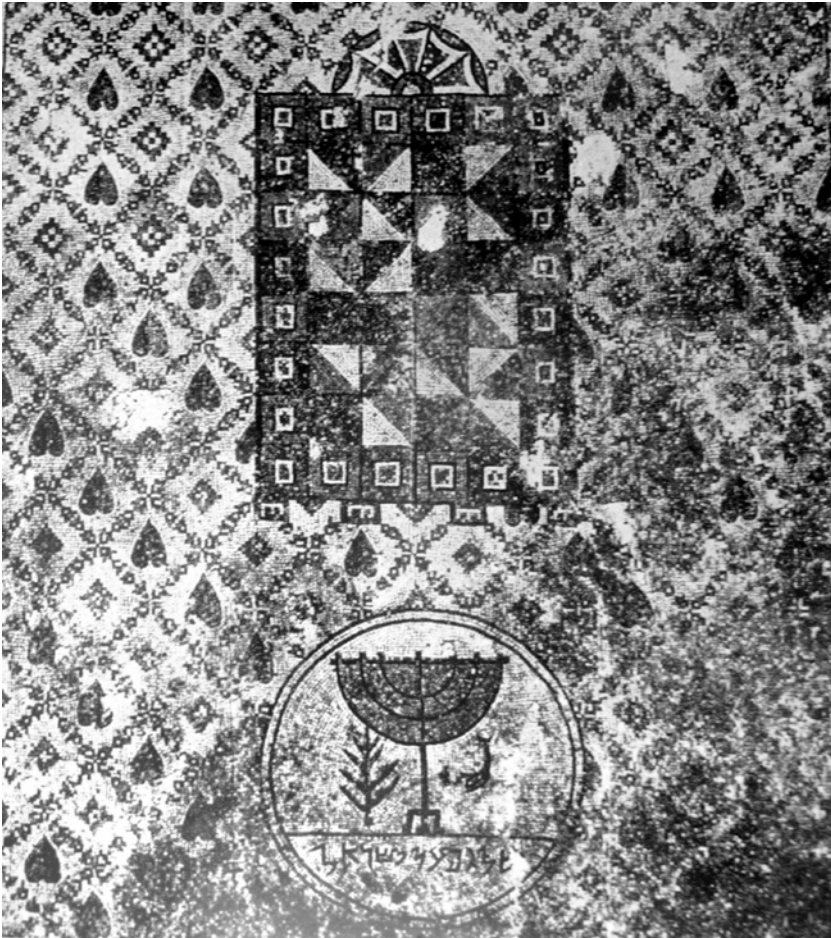


Figure 64. Jericho synagogue mosaic pavement (after D. C. Baramki, "An Early Byzantine Synagogue near Tell es-Sultan, Jericho," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities Palestine* 6 [1938], pl. XIX).

not so different from Muslim visions of the *mihrab*.<sup>20</sup> A stylized menorah appears in a roundel of the synagogue, beneath it the biblical hope for "Peace upon Israel" (Psalm 25) in Hebrew, in Jewish script. It should be remembered that while Islamic law often looked unfavorably upon the

<sup>20</sup> Bezalel Narkiss, *Illuminations from Hebrew Bibles of Leningrad* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990).

public display of crosses, which were construed to be “idols,” no such strictures were applied to menorahs.<sup>21</sup>

Jewish literary output of this period suggests deep focus upon maintaining ancient, or seemingly ancient, traditions. While the earliest evidence of written rabbinic text on parchment appeared in the scroll form—parallel to the Torah and Scripture—by the eighth century Jews, like Christians, and more importantly Muslims, had adopted the codex form. A literary culture with deep roots in rabbinic culture of the Roman and Sasanian empires developed at this time in the urban centers of Jewish life, particularly in Tiberias, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Cairo—both in Hebrew, Aramaic and increasingly in Arabic. Together with rabbinic texts, large codices of Scripture were meticulously created. Punctuation signs that could maintain previously oral reading traditions were created, and a sophisticated form of notation developed. This notation system was sometimes formed in intricate calligraphic patterns by scribes, called micrography; the calligraphic use of Arabic script by Muslims clearly reinforced and gave voice to Jewish interest in the symbolic and aesthetic aspects of Hebrew script.<sup>22</sup> This focus upon Scripture and its preservation parallels similar developments in the Christian, Samaritan, and Muslim communities. Jewish manuscripts, many associated with the Ben-Asher family in Tiberias, became the standard biblical text for all future generations. The most famous of these is the Aleppo Codex, written in Tiberias around 930 CE.<sup>23</sup> As Aramaic fell out of use among Jews and was replaced with Arabic, rabbinic texts that had been composed in Aramaic during the Byzantine period were rewritten and new books written in a kind of biblicalized Hebrew. This focus upon Scripture and Hebrew as God’s holy tongue draws upon deep roots in Jewish tradition—particularly in Palestine—but also speaks to broader questions within the Islamic world regarding the relationship between language and Scripture. While the Samaritans continued to write in Aramaic, this now-literary language was increasingly influenced by

<sup>21</sup> G. R. D. King, “Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): 267–277.

<sup>22</sup> Collette Sirat, *La lettre hébraïque et sa signification*; Leila Avrin, *Micrography as Art [bound together]* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique; Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> The extant sections of the manuscript are available at <http://aleppocodex.org/> (accessed May 2012). For a general introduction to this manuscript, in addition to the website, see M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “The Aleppo Codex and the Rise of the Massoretic Bible Text,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42, no. 3 (1979): 145–163.

Arabic.<sup>24</sup> As they moved to Arabic as their vernacular language, Jews and Samaritans began to compose treatises in Arabic, including legal works, philosophy, biblical exegesis, and biblical translation.

On a social level, the coming of Islam effected deep restructuring within the Jewish community. This period saw a resurgence of the biblical priesthood, as Jews—again absorbing the Muslim model—attempted to assert and reassert biblical pedigrees. These included claims of descent from Aaron the high priest and from King David. Those with messianic aspirations, including the heads of the rival rabbinic academies in Jerusalem and Baghdad, were particularly keen on associating themselves with David.<sup>25</sup>

The Islamic conquest led to the development of a flourishing Jewish community in Jerusalem for the first time since 70 CE.<sup>26</sup> Throughout late antiquity, Jews had been barred from living in the holy city, a prohibition that the church interpreted as punishment for killing Jesus and not accepting Christianity. The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed a proliferation of these Jewish messianic groups, some originating as far away as Persia. Among the most interesting was an apocalyptic sect known as the *Aveilei Zion*, the “Mourners of Zion,” who hoped to hasten the rebuilding of the Temple through emigration to Jerusalem coupled with extreme asceticism.<sup>27</sup> From the polemics against the synagogues of the “rabbani-ties” by a leader of this community, Daniel al-Qumisi, we learn about the continued ritual life of that institution and something of the austerity of this sect:

ובימי מלכות יוון שמו ראשיהם רבאנן מכשול לפני ישראל במצות אשר הפרו את דברי אלהים ויאמרו לישראל כי מן התורה אנחנו מלמדים אתכם ... והם הציבו מצבות בבתי כנסיותיהם ושימו את ארון והיא מצבה והם משתחווים לו כי לא יבינו. ובזאת תדע כי כן כי לא היה בכל גבול ישראל ארון להשתחוות לו כי אם ארון ברית יי והם שמו בכניסיותיהם במדינות רבות בכל כניסה וכניסה ארון ...

And in the days of the Greek kingdom the Rabbis set a stumbling block before Israel [by decreeing their own] commandments that violated the

<sup>24</sup> Alan D. Crown, “Samaritan History: The Byzantine and Muslim Period,” in *The Samaritans*, ed. A. D. Crown (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), 55–81; Haseeb Shehadeh, “The Arabic translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch,” in *The Samaritans*, ed. A. D. Crown, 481–516.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin, *Shoots of David*, 176–177.

<sup>26</sup> The standard history of this period is Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 634–1099.

<sup>27</sup> See Yoram Erder, “The Mourners of Zion,” in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. M. Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 213–235.

words of God. They said to Israel: "We derive these commandments from the Torah itself [even though they were in fact of rabbinic origin, and not biblically ordained]. . . .

And they set up [illicit] monuments in their synagogues and placed within [each] an "ark" and they prostrate to it, for they do not understand. And know this, that never in the [Biblical] past was there an ark in any place of Israel other than the [singular divinely ordained] Ark of the Covenant of God [in the Biblical Tabernacle]. They [the rabbis] placed "arks" in their synagogues in many places—in each and every synagogue, [placing] an [illicit] "ark" . . .<sup>28</sup>

Various groups that by the tenth century were congealing as the Karaites, literally the "scripturalists," may have drawn upon traditions dating to the first century. Sectarian documents known from the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the repository of the Ben Ezra synagogue and the Cairo Genizah, and Christian sources relate the discovery of ancient Jewish scrolls near the Dead Sea in the eighth century. In the tumult of the early Islamic period, Jewish groups broke from the Babylonian rabbinic leadership and formed a more Bible-centered separatist community, sparking a rich legacy of biblical interpretation, legal thought, philosophy, and grammatical studies within both communities. Perhaps emblematic of this schism, Karaites, like Muslims, calculated their calendar differently than the Rabbanities, who were in the process of developing mathematical formulae rather than relying upon actual observation of the moon. Thus, Karaite holidays fell out on different days than those celebrated by the majority of Jews. Though Karaite-Rabbanite polemics were often quite strident, we nonetheless have ample evidence of family relations between the larger Rabbanite and the smaller Karaite communities.<sup>29</sup>

The transition from Byzantine rule to the world of Islam was indeed monumental for both Jews and Samaritans. The role of *dhimmi*, a subject though essentially "protected" group, was far superior to the status of Jews under late antique Christianity, and somewhat better for the still-persecuted Samaritans (whose *dhimmi* status was less stable).<sup>30</sup> While

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1972), 2:75–76.

<sup>29</sup> The most recent scholarship is assembled by Meira Polliack, *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to its History and Literary Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). See also eadem, "Rethinking Karaism: Between Judaism and Islam," *AJS Review* 30, no. 1 (2006): 67–93. Today Karaites number between 30,000 and 40,000, mainly in Israel and in northern California.

<sup>30</sup> Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, 173, 820–825.

the new construction of synagogues was officially limited, Judaism—and synagogue buildings—often flourished under Islamic rule.<sup>31</sup> Jews across the Middle East were transformed by the new umbrella civilization, even as they assumed a unique—if subject—place in the world of Islam.

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<sup>31</sup> Seth Ward, “Construction and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law: A Treatise by Taqī al-Dīn ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Kāfī al-Subkī” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1984).





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